CHAPTER VI

GORBACHEV'S REFORM: POLICY OF GLASNOST AND PERESTROIKA
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POLICY OF GLASNOST:

Stephen White's remarks are absolutely correct that secrecy is a very well-established Russian tradition. In Tsarist times not only military but also harmless social information was withheld from the population at large, and specially from the foreigners. The Bolsheviks briefly abolished secret diplomacy and other customs of the past when they came to power. Older practices, however, soon reasserted themselves and control over the flow of information came to represent a basic element in the Communist system of power.

Soviet official statistics, until recently, left out whole areas of social and economic life, from crime and mortality rates to balance of payments and road accident data. The official media conformed to set

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2. Brief period of glasnost was only related to the criticism and exposure of tsarist rule as well as capitalist system and class enemies of proletariat. In fact, Bolsheviks had re-established pre-publication censorship, declared printing to be a state monopoly, and closed down newspapers owned by non-Bolsheviks Political parties. The October 1917 Decree on the press and related legislative acts banned dissemination of criticism of new regime. See Decrees of the Soviet Authorities Moscow, 1957), pp. 24-25.
stereotype images of the "new Soviet man/women and the degenerate capitalist".

Although this picture was already beginning to change in the 1960s, it was not until Gorbachev's accession to power that the shortcoming in the official media—and indeed the quality of Soviet public life in general became the object of close attention at the very high level of the leadership. From the outset Gorbachev committed himself to a policy of openness or glasnost, embracing not only the printed media but also radio, television and all areas of creative arts.

Before discussing the actual policy of glasnost it is necessary to draw a brief sketch of its meaning, origin and uses in Russian-Soviet politics.

Meaning of Glasnost:

According to Smirnitsky's Russian-English dictionary glasnost is a synonym for publicity, to give publicity; according to Dal's classic dictionary it means "being generally known". It also meant in Tsarist Russia to be a member of a city council. It is the opposite of secrecy.

The concept of glasnost in Russia has a long and honorable history. Describing the main feature of Russian political life in the 16th century, E.L. Keenan has drawn attention to a "practice of hermetic silence later known as neglasnost" or as a contemporary intelligence official would say, the "need to know principle" : those who needed to know, knew, and the
others were kept in ignorance.3

As Russian bureaucracy developed in the 18th and 19th centuries the phrase "this document is not subject to glasnost" (Ne Podlezhit glasnosti or more often, Ne Podlezhit oglesheniyu) became standard. On the other hand, glasnost became one of the main demands of the radicals, above all Alexander Herzen.4

The demand for glasnost figures prominently in all the early issue of Kolkol (The Bell), the only free Russian periodical at the time published by Herzen in London. "Where there is no glasnost", Herzen wrote, "and no legal right but only the charity of the Tsar, public opinion has no influence". He further wrote "whoever opposes glasnost, whoever is against the liberation of the peasants - he is an enemy of the people, he is our enemy.5

Soviet Tradition of Glasnost:

Laqueur surveyed the use of the word glasnost by Lenin and he found the word mentioned forty times in Lenin's Works, most notably in an article in Pravda (September 20, 1918) in which he suggested that

5. Alexander Herzen, Kolkol December 1, 1857 and January 1,1858, quoted in Walter, n.4, p.50.
glasnost in the press should serve as a tool for mobilization and education of toiling masses and in another place he advocated open and public criticism of economic inefficiency and of the cumbersome state bureaucracy.

Everything that takes place at a socialist enterprise should be made public (predavat glasnosti). The shortcomings in the economic activity of each and every commune should be disclosed to the public. We need public criticism which will expose the evils of our economy, strike a responsive chord with the public and help us cure social problems.

Like the "enlightened bureaucrats" of the 19th century, Lenin conceived of glasnost as leadership-initiated and leadership regulated criticism designed, in his view, to reverse undesirable socio-economic trends, accelerate economic development, and boost labour productivity. In the political realm, he saw the function of glasnost as a mean to castigate bureaucratic malpractice and stimulate public participation in political life, that is to say, to strengthen the regime's legitimacy. In Lenin's view, "the state is strong when the masses know everything,

6. Walter, n.4, p.50.
render their opinion on every issue and consciously respond to every policy".9

It should be noted that Lenin's view of glasnost differed fundamentally from the western concept of the free flow of information. Glasnost was intended for parameters within which divergent opinion could be voiced. Open public debates in the press were largely restricted to sanctioned policy issues. Predictably, Lenin believed that the media should not inform the general public about sensitive foreign policy issues such as foreign credits and western technology transfers to Russia.10 Extending the dialectical process to media policy, he called for a 'balanced' news coverage, that is for positive accounts of USSR's success to outnumber critical assessment of its shortcomings and failures.11

To silence the regimes critics, Lenin had instituted Military Revolutionary Tribunals operating under the state security organs. To Lenin's thinking, such repressive measures against free political thought were not inconsistent with the policy of glasnost which allowed for a relatively free debate among the various factions of the party on controversial policy issues.

10. Ibid., p.21.
11. Ibid., p.21.
Stalin was no believer in glasnost. His whole style of ruling was based on the principle of neglasnost.

The concept of glasnost changed in the post-Stalin period, but more in terms of emphasis than essence. During the Khrushchev era, the media was directed to criticize Stalinism and its political supporters. The publication of unorthodox literary writings and discussion of sensitive political issues brought allies for Nikita Khrushchev, especially from among the intelligentsia, against the Stalinist rank and file in the party bureaucracy. However, this relatively liberal information policy did not allow the printing of explicit criticism of the Soviet political system or of Khrushchev’s policies.

Later on, the concept was used in the writings of Sakharov and other dissidents. When Solzhenitsyn was excluded from the Soviet writers’ union in 1969 he wrote in an open letter: “glasnost that is the first condition of health of all societies. He who does not wish this openness for his fatherland does not want to purify it of its diseases, but only to drive them inward, there to foster”.12

Under Brezhnev, the old Stalinist words for criticism and self criticism were for more frequently used than glasnost.

The decision of the politburo in August 1986 to halt the work on the diversion of the Siberian rivers into Central Asia was also a sign of the times: while the public stand taken against it by leading writers and other public figures was not the only factor which influenced the decision, it certainly contributed greatly to it. Instead of fading away, glasnost gathered momentum during the second half of 1986 and reached its climax in 1987. Issues were now discussed in public which had been forbidden for fifty years and longer, and there was both the demand for even more glasnost and expressions of concern that freedom had gone too far and was undermining the authority of state and party. The Soviet Media whose freedom had been proverbial, as Laqueur described, became interesting and Soviet commentators noted that events inside the Soviet Union were now far more important than developments abroad.13

Gorbachev's Policy of Glasnost and Soviet Public Life:

There were several reasons behind launching the policy of glasnost. In the first place, Gorbachev appears to have believed that glasnost would help to bring about a more energetic and constructive atmosphere in the Soviet workplace and thus to reverse the economic stagnation of the later Brezhnev years.13

"Broad up to date and honest information", he told a conference in December 1984, "is a sign of trust in people, respect for their intelligence and feeling, and their ability to make sense of developments". Equally it raised the level of labour activism, reduce bureaucracy and helped to avoid errors in party and state work.14 "The better the people are informed" he told the Central Committee that elected him, "the more consciously they act, the more actively they support the party, its plans and programmatic objective's.15 People, he wrote in his book Perestroïka, "should know what is good, and what is bad". Glasnost would help them to gain better understanding of the Soviet past and present, and "on the basis of this understanding to participate in the restructuring effort consciously.16

In fact, glasnost was intended to reverse the drift of the Soviet system toward crisis or even breakdown with painful, frequently radical self imagination intended to build popular pressure for sweeping reform to a new liveliness and credibility of words to serve the goal of reform in the area and material self-interest in the state and public spheres.

15. Ibid, p.131.
Glasnost was linked to stiffer enforcement of bureaucratic accountability and aimed at improving the steering capacity of the centre by reducing the opacity and resistance of the lower reaches of the bureaucracy to supervisory control from above. Above all, it made it considerably harder for well-organized bureaucratic interests to appropriate the party's ideological control over political expression for parochial political needs. Formerly so many social issues were closed off to critical comments. In early 1980's matters had reached the point that only the lowest and weaker agencies and territorial organizations' bodies were unable to fend off routine criticism. Glasnost, then reduced though not eliminated the power that many party and government offices exercised in demanding that public comment on matters falling under their territorial or departmental purview first be cleared by them.17

The monopoly and other failings of the official media had in any case attracted a lot of criticism. In this regard Stephen White cited an example of V.D. Polyakov complain in Sovetskaya Rossiya.18 Polyakov was a well-read man who followed the central and local


18. Stephen, n.1, p.27.
press and never missed the evening T.V. news. He knew
detailed what was happening in various African
countries, but he had "only a very rough idea of what
was happening in his own city". After studying a file
of the local paper Sovetskaya Rossiya's correspondent
had to agree : he could not find an answer to a single
question of public interest that Polyakov had raised.19
White has given another example which greatly exhibit
the bureaucratic control over mass media in Soviet
Union. There was a major earthquake in Tajikistan in
Soviet Central Asia, but no details were made known
other than "lives had been lost". At about the same
time there had been earthquake in Mexico and a Volcanic
eruption in Columbia : both were covered fully with on-
the-spot reports, including details of the casualties
that had been suffered. In this regard a correspondent
of Sovetskaya Rossiya asked a question: was Tajikistan
farther from Moscow -- than Latin America?20

In fact not informing the masses about local
events or importance of domestic affairs was the
specific characteristics of command administrative
system which Gorbachev inherited from previous regimes.
Problems were very acute due to excess bureaucratic
control over mass media. The state statistical service
was closed off access to many data series. Even social

scientists could not discuss certain sensitive subjects, including crime, suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, ecological threats, migration, public health and accidents.\textsuperscript{21} Indeed, according to the prominent reform scholar, Tatiana Zaslavskaya, at the worst point the number of prohibited topics for research exceeded the number of prohibited open one.\textsuperscript{22}

The point was not that, due to official prohibition on certain topics or due to excess bureaucratization, the official media were silent or one sided on many issues of the day. The truth, as Sovetskaya Rossiya pointed out would eventually emerge. The problem was that if those who were responsible failed to explain the real state of affairs at the earliest opportunity or deliberately hid it, all this would be replaced by gossip, conjecture and exaggeration.\textsuperscript{23} The shortcoming of official media, in particular, encouraged a greater degree of interest in western radio and TV broadcasts. The danger of failing to report fully and promptly on the whole range of foreign and domestic developments was that, increasingly, the information deficit would be


\textsuperscript{22} Tatyana Zaslavskaya, "Sociology's Role in Restructuring Society", \textit{CDSP}, vol.39, no.6, 1987, pp.3 and 22.

\textsuperscript{23} Sovetskaya Rossia, 24 November 1985, p.1.
satisfied by 'foreign voices with anti-soviet overtones', as Sovetskaya Rossiya put it.24

The poor quality of official information contributed towards a still more serious outcome: inadequate discussion of policy alternatives, ill-considered decisions and in some cases wasteful and damaging 'projects of the country; such as the Baikal Amur mainline railway across Siberia, completed in 1985, or the ambitious plan to divert the Siberian rivers southwards, finally abandoned in 1987. If people, Zaslavskaya argued, were denied information on the conditions under which they lived, they would hardly assume a more active role in public life; and if sociological feedback was ignored, there would be many more mistaken decision by the authorities.25 It was consideration of this kind--to activate the human factor and to avoid costly errors--that appear to have contributed most directly to Gorbachev's commitment to glasnost in all field of public and cultural life.

Glasnost in Action:

Due to policy initiative of glasnost and freedom of press, people began to re-examine the Soviet past. Many revelation threw light on various shortcomings of command administrative system specially during stagnation period. It also became clear to the Soviet

people that Stalin had committed various crimes against Soviet society unparalleled in world history. His method of administration and its negative impact on Soviet society was the centre of attack by the Soviet people. While Brezhnev's predecessor, Khrushchev, by contrast, came to be seen in increasingly favorable terms as a courageous reformer who had exposed Stalin's crimes and raised the living standards of ordinary people.  

For Fedor Burlatsky, writing in Literaturnaya gazeta, Khrushchev was a representative of the NEP trend in the party which supported democratization and was opposed to the use of coercion in industry and agriculture. For him, Khrushchev had indeed crushed the personality cult and raised living standards; his fatal weakness was that he was unable to distinguish between genuine supporter and flatterers, which left him unprotected when his opponents mobilized against him in 1964.  

Reflecting this different and more positive view, Khrushchev's secret speech was finally published in the USSR in 1989 and there was a call to re-bury him with full honour in the Kremlin wall.

26. In an opinion poll of 1989, for instance, 51 percent of respondent took a positive view of his administration, compared with 10 percent for Stalin and only seven percent in the case of Brezhnev. For detail see Soviet Weekly (Moscow), 18 February 1989, p.6.


The Stalin question was important and in this regard Gorbachev insisted that there must be 'no forgotten names (or) blank spots in Soviet history or Literature' and he further said that they never forgive or justify what happened in 1937-38. In this regard he further said the command administrative system that had been established for the management of economy, however, had been allowed to extend into socio-political life, choking off its democratic potential, and this had led to the wanton repressive measures of the 1930s - 'real crimes' in which many thousand of people inside and outside the party had been subjected to wholesale repression.\(^{29}\) This was a lesson that subsequent generations must not be allowed to forget.

A special commission had been established in 1987 to investigate the crimes of Stalin period specially of 1930s, and that a new text book on the history of the CPSU would be prepared. The special Commission, chaired by Mikhail Solementsev, set to work and cleared more than 600 purge victims in August 1988\(^{30}\) Most importantly, Nikolai Bukhairn, a notable victim of the purge, was one of the first to be rehabilitated through this process. In February 1988, fifty years after his show trial, Bukharin and eighteen other members of the 'anti-soviet right-Trotskyist bloc' were officially

\(^{29}\) M.S. Gorbachev, n.14, vol.5, pp.397-402.

\(^{30}\) Pravda 18 August 1988.

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cleared of the charge against them by the USSR Supreme court.31 He was posthumously restored the party membership in July 1988 and in October he was reinstated as a member of the Academy of sciences.32 In October Bukharin exhibitions opened in Moscow and Bukharin's articles and book began to appear in Soviet press.

Other important leaders like Lev Kamenev, Grigory Zinoviev, Karl Redak and other old Bolsheviks who had been sentenced to death in 1937 had been rehabilitated in July 1988.33 Victims of 'Leningrad affairs' of 1950, 'workers opposition' group, Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and Leningrad Centre were also cleared of all charges and rehabilitated in due course. Trotsky's son Sergei Sedov, another victim of the purges, was rehabilitated in November 1988 and Trotsky's own contribution to the revolutionary cause began to receive a more balanced historical assessment.34

Just as the victims of Stalinism rehabilitated, so too the instrument or beneficiaries of Stalinism were exposed and dishonored. In the list of dishonoured person, important figure were Stalin's chief prosecutor Andrei Vyshinsky, Stalin's Cultural Commissar, Andrei

34. Stephen, n.1, p.83.
Zhdanov. They were stripped of their posthumous honours.  

An adequate account of Stalinism and the Soviet past had to involve the historical record itself, and not just judgment about it as Stephen White argued. In this respect Gorbachev years made some significant contributions. The Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 with its secret protocols providing for the annexation of the Baltic republics was one such document, was published in the Baltic Press in 1988 summer and its authenticity and existence was acknowledged by Kremlin leader in 1989.  

An extended discussion took place of the numbers that Stalin had killed: for some it was about a million by the end of 1930s, while for others such as Roy Medvedev the total was at least 12 million, with a further 38 million repressed in other ways. While the KGB itself reported a figure of 3.8 million victim in the period 1930-53, of whom 786,098 had been shot. Perhaps still more significant, a number of mass graves of the victims of Stalinist repression began to discovered and reported in the local press. One of the most important of these was in the Kuropathy forest.

near Minsk, where what was described as a ‘human slaughter house’ was discovered in 1988.39

All these revelation were certainly a big blow upon bureaucrats and elites of Soviet society. Revelations showed that glorious years of Stalin era was, in reality, not ‘glorious’ and due to condemnation of the past the legitimacy of bureaucratic rule decreased up to maximum levels. During the years of glasnost, bureaucrats and elites were highly demoralized.

Public Information and ‘Taboos’:

As Zaslavskaya and others had remarked, the quality of information had steadily deteriorated over the Brezhnev period as problem after problem was ‘resolved’ by simply discontinuing the publication of any information about it. The census, for example, has always been a vital instrument for planners and government officials as well as for social scientist. But the Soviet's post war censuses were not published regularly. Even the official statistical handbook, which published annually since 1956 were not up-to-dated from 1970s. Figures on life expectancy in the early 1980s were those for the ten years earlier. Figures on infant mortality were simply discontinued; a sharp rise in alcohol consumption was disguised by merging the figures for sale of drink with those for

foodstuffs. Given an information base of this kind, Stephen White argued, it was difficult to disagree with official claims that the USSR had entered a qualitatively new phase of social development in the late 1960s and that these and other shortcomings of capitalism had long since been left behind.40

The Gorbachev era reversed the old approach of hiding the information. First annual statistical handbook of Gorbachev era published in 1986 in which contained a wealth of informations that had not been available for many years. It provided the informations in great details of mortality rate and life expectancy; first ever systematic data on abortions in the USSR.41 The first figures on suicide and crime for many decades appeared in 1989. Previously they were closed to public discussion. Abortion, suicide and crime were only a few of the 'forbidden themes' that became open for discussion in the late 1980s. Another was prostitution. Previously held to be in principle, a phenomena confined to capitalist societies, it came to be acknowledged under Gorbachev that this was an 'integral part of Moscow's tourist service'.42

40. Stephen, n.1, p.86.

41. Pravda, 6 December 1988, p.3.

Another manifestation of the glasnost was seen in the context of secrecy in Soviet government. According to one Soviet scholar, V. Rubanov, the political culture of the Soviet elite had been shaped by the elite's 'usurpation' of political power from the 'masses'. With the result that the former found it necessary to monopolize all channels of information. Keeping the 'masses' uninformed was 'a crucial condition for the convert realization of the elite's political interests'. But not only the elite had been affected. Stalinism made secrecy into a general obsession in Soviet society. There was considerable resistance below the elite level to attempts to reduce secrecy.43

The Soviet bureaucratic elite did not have a monopoly on deception. But what made the Soviet case different was the arrogance of the elite when it came to handling information, combined with the absence of a tradition of the rule of law and of a government accountable to the public.44 A Soviet legal correspondent characterized the attitude of average Soviet officials towards the law: "In their


44. On the lack of legal tradition in pre-revolutionary Russia, see Richard Pipes, Russia under the old Regime, (New York, 1974), p.289.
consciousness, there is neither the slightest concept of law, nor understanding of it nor fear of it".45

Having no respect for the rule of law, various bureaucratic interests practiced deception both against the public and against the central government. This cult of secrecy was seriously changed under Gorbachev. The reformers view on secrecy could be summed up as follows:

a. excessive secrecy increasingly contradicted new political and economic realities and further undermined the public's trust in the government;

b. secrecy served as a prop for bureaucratic regime unchecked by the democratic institutions;

c. secrecy had a legitimate role in protecting state interests, but the system of secrecy needed to be significantly modified.46

Hence, in order to restore the public confidence, in July 1988, the Politburo adopted a special resolution calling for the creation of an information society in order to reverse the Soviet Union's growing

46. V. Rubanov, n.43, pp.28-36.
lag in information technology.47 Yet another manifestation of glasnost was the emergence of a myriad of informal groups and associations.

Another outcome of glasnost were revelations of many other kinds. The first useful figures for Soviet and Warsaw Pact troop and weapon numbers, for instance, were reported in early 1989.48 Gorbachev, speaking to the Congress of People's Deputies in May 1989, provided the first meaningful figure for Soviet defence expenditure at 77 billion rubles, or 15 percent of the state budget; it was four times higher than the figure previously published. Prime Minister Ryzkov, speaking to the same gathering, gave the first ever official figures for the cost of the war in Afghanistan and the extent of Soviet foreign debt.49 The worst ever rocket disaster, in 1960, was finally reported in early 1989; so too was the nuclear disaster in Ural mountains in 1957, much of the area of which was still contaminated.50 The brutal suppression of demonstration in Novocherkassk in 1962 - there had been twenty four deaths - was officially acknowledged in 1989. The first official figures for the exercise of the death penalty


were made public in 1991; so too were a series of secret cities, unmarked on ordinary maps, where nuclear and other weapons had been produced.51 Glasnost, moreover, meant that the Soviet population was given unprecedented access to the discussion of issues of this kind. The Party Conference in 1988 was covered by the media only in part, but the first Congress of People's Deputies in 1989 was carried in full and, in March 1989 central TV carried its first broadcast from a Central Committee Plenum. In 1990 two journalist were invited, for the first time, to attend a meeting of the Secretariat.52 Innovations of this kind were paralleled by the development of a more extensive network of opinion polling organizations, the most important of which was All-Union Centre for the Study of Public Opinion, established in 1988 under trade union auspices.53

Problems of Glasnost:

In the glasnost era, various revelations had a staggering effect, but not because the truth about the Soviet past and present had been totally unknown in Soviet Union and abroad. The great innovation was the fact that it was now possible to talk and write openly

51. Izvestia, 6 April 1991, p.6 (for death Penalty); Pravda, 24 September 1991; for secret cities; see Izvestia, 10 January 1992, pp.1,8.


about what had been taboo earlier. Glasnost caused a
state of euphoria, but more among the people outside
the Soviet Union, for Soviet citizens had learned from
bitter experience that what had been given by the state
could be taken away at almost any time. There was
little enthusiasm for glasnost among the political
bosses and there is no denying the fact that for them
it had been much easier to run the country under the
old system. Nor was glasnost deeply rooted among wide
sections of the population.

Despite all this open talks and publication,
glasnost faced so many limitations and obstacles.
Immediate after Gorbachev election on March 11, 1985,
glasnost was mentioned with increasing frequency in the
Soviet media. Yet for about a year it remained a mere
slogan, and most of the taboos were still intact. In
the 27th Congress, the slogan was prominently
reiterated but at the time of Chernobyl disaster in
April 1986 the media failed to report it. It only threw
doubts on whether the new openness was sincere.54

Gradually during the second half of 1986 the media
began to discuss crime and corruption and
immoral traffic, but there were some first warnings on
the part of the authorities: glasnost was not a

54. V. Tolz, "A Chronological Overview of Gorbachev's
Campaign for Glasnost", Radio Liberty Report,
(Munich), Jan 21, 1987.
synonym for unlimited license and sensationalism.55

Academician Victor Afnasyev, editor of Pravda issued similar warning at the sixth Congress of the Journalist Union in March 1987. Some other writers such as Yuri Bondarev, Peter Proskurin, and Feliks Chuyev claimed that glasnost had already gone much too far, that it had become mainly destructive, and that those who engaged in it were not sincere patriot but "pseudo-democrats".56

However, the more glasnost there was the greater the resistance against it, and it did not came only from minor party secretaries in distant part of the Soviet Union or from the conservative writers who feared for their reputation and royalties. Opposition to glasnost came from inside the Politburo. The main opponent was Ligachev, the second man in the Soviet leadership in 1986-87. In 1986 he warned writers and journalist be cautious while reporting the negative phenomena.57 In March 1987, he said that the re-examination of history should emphasize above all the 'period of triumph of socialist construction' and not a 'portrait of our history as a series of continuous mistakes and disappointments'. In Ligachev's view there was too much emphasis on the negative side of Soviet

56. Walter, n.4, p.249.
57. Teatr, August 1986.
history— and also on negative reports on the current
soviet scene.58 Such criticism was more than a little
disingenuous since no one focused only on negative
reports. What Ligachev and his supporters wanted was
not a 'golden mean' but a different mixture — say, one
part glasnost and three or four positive reports on the
great achievements of the Soviet people past and
present.59

There were no adequate guarantees against
political interference in the work of the media. The
press law published in Draft in December 1989 after
three years of discussion and then adopted in final
form in June 1990, nominally abolished censorship other
than for state security and established a limited
'right of information' for the ordinary citizen, but
publications still had to be 'registered' and attempts
to change the existing political and social system were
explicitly prohibited.60 Freedom of press was further
restricted because supply of paper were still in the
hand of government.

A perusal of the Soviet press revealed that no
explicit criticism of the General Secretary, his
policies, or his political allies appeared in print

59. Walter, n.4, p.251.
60. For the text, see Sovetskaya Kultura, December 5,
1989; for discussion see Izvestia, November 26,
1989.
till the end of 1991. No overtly dissenting views or opinions for Gorbachev's opponents were made public.

In the area of domestic politics, serious discussions were largely limited to the central press and Moscow based public organization. Outside Moscow the situation was more complicated. The central press was replete with articles illustrating the limited effectiveness and even lack of glasnost in provincial towns and rural location.\(^{61}\)

Thus the limit of glasnost policy gradually became obvious. Most of the applications for marches and demonstrations were turned down by the authorities; those which went ahead irrespective of permission were broken up by the police and some of the participants arrested. Such was the case, for instance, with the anti-Stalin protest demonstration in Moscow on 5 March 1988.\(^{62}\)

At the local level, officials were less willing to allow their action to be critically evaluated in publication, which they themselves controlled. Opposition to glasnost also existed among high level bureaucrats for whom public criticism of their actions was seen as a threat to their status, career

\(^{61}\) One of the means of restricting the impact of glasnost one outside Moscow was the administrative restriction of individual subscriptions to reformist periodicals and rationing of paper for books.

\(^{62}\) Vecherniaia Moskva, March 5, 1988.
advancement, and privileges. Remarkably, the new press centre created at the ministerial level and specially designed to promote glasnost also represented an obstacle to Gorbachev's policy. According to Soviet reports, the press centres not only blocked the release of unfavorable information but also commissioned laudatory articles about themselves in the Central Press.63

More ominously, there were signs that the central authorities and particularly Gorbachev, annoyed by a steady and some time exaggerated stream of criticism, were beginning to reassert the control they had earlier seemed willing to relinquish. The state Radio and TV Committee was reconstituted in the late 1990 and give a new head, Leonid Kravchenko, formerly director of the official news agency TASS.64 Almost immediately the popular TV programme vzglyad (view point) was taken off the air because of an interview it was proposing to run with the former foreign minister Edward Shevardnadze.65 Central coverage of the Baltic events of the early 1991 was blatantly biased, the miners who struck in sympathy with them were accused of financial link with the USA, and then three announcers of the late night television news were suspended from their duties on

64. Pravda, 12 February 1991.
65. Izvestia, 8 January 1991.
Kravchenko's direct instructions. Kravchenko was dismissed after the putsch and replaced by the liberal editor of *Moscow News* Yegor Yakovlev. Developments of this kind were a clear sign that glasnost under Gorbachev was still some distance from an unqualified freedom of press; its meaning, in Stephen White's word, in any instance depended upon the changing and precarious balance between authoritarian and reformist sentiment at every level of the society. On the whole it can be said that glasnost was very popular among intellectuals, less so among ordinary workers, and not at all to the taste of party and state officials at all levels.

**REFORMING THE COMMAND SYSTEM OF ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT**

The Soviet economy was marred by deep-rooted difficulties by the late 1970s. The most striking indicator of these difficulties was the rate of economic growth, which fell consistently from the 1950s to the early 1980s, with only exception of slight reversal as witnessed in the late 1960s. (See Table 1).

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Table - 1
Soviet economic growth, 1951-1985 (average annual rates of growth, official Data, 90).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Produced national income</th>
<th>Gross Ind. Prod'n.</th>
<th>Gross agric. Prod'n.</th>
<th>Labour Real Prod'y incomes</th>
<th>Incomes Per head</th>
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<td>13.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>7.3</td>
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<td>10.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-65</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
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<td>8.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-75</td>
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<td>7.4</td>
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Levels of economic growth in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in fact, were the lowest ever recorded in Soviet peace time the history. Average annual growth between 1975 and 1985 was only 2 per cent, and from 1979 to 1982 there was no growth at all. And since the population continued to increase this meant that the standard of living of at least part of the population actually declined.

It was the massive bureaucratization of the Soviet Command economic system which could be held responsible for this state of economy as manifested in declining
growth rate, stagnation and technological backwardness. The managers reacted by increasing expenditures by using more natural resources and manpower to counter balance the falling rates of growth. But the results were predictable as JECC of USA noted: "It is the world's largest producer of energy but uses two to three times more energy per unit of economic output than the leading industrial countries. It is the world's largest producer of wheat but 20 percent of the crop lost from field to mill because of inadequate transport and shortage. It is one of the world's most populous nations but suffers from the shortage of labour, partly because of low productivity".68

The serious crises would have become manifest earlier but for the fact that Soviet Union was not an open society. Quantitative output frequently continued to rise, and on paper there was no problem. The statistics were wrong or misleading and since elite in society did not have to queue up, they may not even have been aware of the many economic problems.

Therefore, when Gorbachev became the General Secretary in March 1985, he inherited an economy beset with serious economic problems like perennial shortage, imbalances, stagnation and corruption. Gorbachev realised how serious the problem is, as he noted in his

book *Perestroika* that some thing happened in the later half of seventies "that was at first sight inexplicable. The country lost momentum, economic failure became more frequent, difficulty began to accumulate and deteriorate and unresolved problems to multiply. Elements of what we call stagnation and other phenomena alien to socialism began to appear in the life of society. A kind of 'braking mechanism' affecting social and economic development formed... something strange was taking place, the huge fly wheel of powerful machine was revolving while either transmission from it to work, place was skidding or drive belt were too loose".69 The overall description seems accurate even if the metaphors are questionable; drive belts which are too loose can be fastened but this, quite obviously, was not the case with the economy. Nor was the stagnation sudden and inexplicable as Laqueur disagrees with Gorbachev.70 It had been coming for a considerable time and some Western Soviet economist like Alec Nove had, in fact, predicted it. The Soviet Command economy had developed in certain historical conditions; it had always aimed at qualitative growth; it had functioned reasonably well in preparing for war. But it had not essentially changed since the days of Stalin, and with the approach

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69. Mikhail, n.2, pp.18-19.
70. Walter, n.4, p.198.
of a new scientific - technological revolution, it had become largely useless a giant 'braking mechanism'.

REFORM MEASURES:

As Stephen White\textsuperscript{72} contends, the broad framework of economic reform is set out in Gorbachev's address to the 27th Party Congress in 1986. The top priority in his view, was to overcome the factors bedevilling the country's socio-economic development as quickly as possible and resume the growth of earlier decades.\textsuperscript{73}

Not only was it necessary to accelerate the rate of economic growth: it must be a new quality of growth, based upon scientific and technological progress, structural change and new form of management and labour incentives. Gorbachev told the Congress that the main problem of the economy, however, was that it had "failed to produce timely political assessment of the changed economic situation\textsuperscript{74} and of the need for a shift from extensive growth, based on additional inputs and labour and resources, to intensive growth based on higher level of technology and productivity. A change

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p.198.


\textsuperscript{73} 27\textsuperscript{th} Congress : Document and Resolutions (New Delhi, 1986), p.4.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, p.29.
of this kind was not just desirable; there was "no other way".75

Restructuring Planning System:

The revised party programme and the guidelines for the new 12th Five year plan, in 27th Congress, set out as their central objective the doubling of national income by year 2000. This, in turn, necessitated a thorough modernization of the economy on the basis of the most developed science and technology, with particular priority, being given to the machine building and electronics industries, to energy saving technologies and improved method of construction. In agriculture, the chief priority would be to satisfy the country's food requirements on the basis of greater degree of autonomy for collective and state farms and greater incentives. The management of the economy as a whole was to be decentralized, with Gosplan concentrating its efforts on long-term objectives and with enterprises guided to a much greater extent by their performance in the market place. The financial system would be reorganized; price would be more flexible, and cooperative of all kinds would be encouraged to extend the scale of their operation. The 'human factor' was also emphasized, including an extension of the right of workers to elect their own management.76

75. Ibid.
76. Ibid, pp.31-56.
Most of these objectives were reflected in the 12th Five Year plan covering the period 1986-90, which the party Congress adopted in the form of Basic Directives and which was passed by the USSR Supreme Soviet later in the year. More detailed guidelines for economic reforms were approved by the Central Committee in June 1987. Central Committee tried to improve the system of centralized planning. So far as the agricultural sector is concerned it envisaged to give greater autonomy to 'collective' or 'family contract' by which a small group of workers obtained the use of an area of land for a fixed price and receive in return the right to sell their surplus produce for whatever it would fetch collective farm markets. This would accelerate much more local self-sufficiency as guideline stressed.79

In the document it was also maintained that the annual, five-year and longer-term (usually 15-year) plans would continue to be the framework for the development of the Soviet economy. All five years plans were to be based on input from the enterprises, ministries, the Gosplan, and the Council of Ministers; and were to be ratified at Congress of CPSU. In the

77. Stephen, n.223, p.89.
79. Ibid, pp.22-23.
planning process, the main change was to be the shift from 'economic methods of planning to the activities of enterprises on the basis of planned targets, long term stable economic standards, state order and allocations. 80

This reform had one major implication. Since plan targets were no longer to be 'directive', the enterprises would be ostensibly allowed more freedom to choose suppliers and to make operational decisions without direct influence from the centre. The managers who were most familiar with the operations and problems of their enterprises would then be free to make more decisions on his own.

Resource Allocation:

In the guidelines of June 1987 the reform in the system of resource allocation was also necessitated. Now there would be major changes in price formation and public finance, involving a reduction in budgetary subsidies and the ending of the "illusion of cheapness and inexhaustibility of natural resources". Now enterprises would buy necessary resources from the appropriate department of wholesale trade - wholesale - store run by USSR State Committee for Material and Technical Supply (Gossnab). There should be more competition between different sections of economy; between state and cooperative enterprises, and between

80. Ibid.
scientific and industrial organizations. More generally, there should be move from administrative or 'command' form of management to indirect or 'economic' controls based upon financial and other regulations.81

Principle of Profit and Loss Accounting:

The law on the state enterprises (Association) which came into effect on 1 January 198682 may be regarded as a milestone in the reforms programme. Infact, this new 'Enterprise Law' was based on the 'Basic Economic Guideline' which was adopted in June 1987 by Central Committee of CPSU. The main objective of the new law was to bring "real economic independence" to the enterprise on the basis of profit and loss accounting and thus freeing it from the dictates of ministries and higher level economic bodies. Interestingly, prior to the enactment of the law of state enterprises, ministries used to provide detailed plans of physical output to each enterprise, for it was responsible for the fulfilment of the respective ministerial plan targets. As a result, the ministries were turned into huge bureaucratic organisations with large number of supervisors engaged in overseeing the enterprises. Now on the basis of some general direction, enterprises were given the freedom

to draw up its own plan. Enterprises would have to take into account the 'state orders' (goszakazy) placed with it by the central authorities together with commercial orders placed with it by other enterprises and organisations. The income from these activities, in line with the principle of self financing, was intended to cover the costs that were incurred, including wages, scientific technical innovation, the expansion of production and social and cultural benefits for the work force.83

On June 4, 1990 M. Gorbachev, as President of the USSR promulgated the new 'Law on Enterprises on the USSR' which was intended to grant more freedom to the enterprises to operate on commercial lines and further loosening the control of ministries over them.84

Gorbachev, thus attempted to give autonomy to these economic structures. However this autonomy often remained more theoretical than practical. Delays in production, decreased output, put a great strain on these reforms.

Workers Participation in Management:–

The 'Law on the State Enterprises sought to simultaneously bring the 'human factor' into play by democratizing the organisation of the work place,

83. Ibid., pp.71-82.
making a departure from the Stalinist tradition by which workers were regarded nothing more than 'little cogs' in the enterprises. Through the new law workers were to elect their managers at all levels, from the Director down to Workshop Head, 'as a rule' on a competitive basis. The factory Director, who represented the interests of the state as well as those of the work force, was to be elected by a general meeting for five years at a time, although his appointment was subjected to approval at higher level and the Director himself remained individually responsible for enterprise performance. The law also established a council of labour collective, elected by the work force for two or three years at a time, which was responsible for convening factory meetings at least twice a year and for ensuring that the decisions of such meetings were implemented. The aim of these and other changes was to "enhance the peoples labour activity, bring into play hither to unused resources, raise efficiency and so achieve higher rates of real growth with high quality production".

Reforming the Agricultural Management:

There were many problems in agricultural sector, some of the problems were historical one. Like

85. Walter, n.137, pp.71-82.

premature abandonment of the NEP, forced
collectivization and human tragedy of 1930s with its
famine and victimization of millions of peasant. World
War II, excessive Central Control and Coercive approach
to agricultural management, denial of basic civil
rights to farmers, and inability to implement the
reform programme of 1965 as well as unsatisfactory
compromise of 1982 food programme.87 All this reflected
in very poor state of agricultural production.

In order to overcome the shortcoming of
agricultural sector a superministry was formed in late
1985 named Gosagroprom (the State Agro-Industrial
Committee which brought together five existing
ministries and two State Committee. Superministry
intended to supersede many ministerial and party
bureaucracies which made it next to impossible for the
collective farms to function more or less rationally.
Efforts were also made to encourage vertical
integration like the linking of farms with storage,
distribution and processing enterprises; and there were
financial incentives from 1986 onwards, for production
above plan target.88 Despite this, and other changes,
many difficulties remained to exists. Nearly 20,000
collectives and state forms (42 percent of the total)
in the late 1980's were operating at a loss. Immediate

87. Stephen, n.72, pp.94-95.
88. Stephen, n.1, p.117.
problems were serious shortage of minor agricultural equipment and political direction at the local level by party bureaucracy proved very difficult to reduce.89

Another device at removing excessive control of bureaucracy in agricultural sector was a policy of encouraging a wide variety of forms of non-state economic activity, on both on individual and group basis. Under legislation, which was approved in November 1986 and came into force in May 1987, a wide variety of forms of non-state economic activity was specially legalized.90 This measure was necessary because excessive political control in local collective farm was the root cause of the failure of 1985 and 1986 programmes.

In May 1988, a new law on cooperatives was adopted91 and at that time Gorbachev suggested that greater use should be made of the collective or family contact by which a small group of workers obtained the use of an area of land for a fixed price and receive in turn the right to sell their surplus produce for whatever it would fetch at collective farm market. Thus the law on cooperative organisation was in the direction of this spirit which Gorbachev stated. The

law was viewed by scholars as a radical step of Gorbachev in the sense that the cooperatives were, in principle exempted from obligatory state plans and state orders, although they were required at least to inform the relevant authorities of their intentions. Cooperatives could fix their own prices.92 Previously the collective farms (Kolkhozy and Sovkhozy) and the cooperative trading network were 'cooperatives' in name only. Both were integral parts of the state planning system and both had been subjected to detailed order from above.93

Through the new law cooperative were granted right to conduct of economy and other activities on the basis of their own hired or leased property, independence, self management; self-financing (Art.4). They had been allowed to own buildings, structures, machines, equipment, transportation facilities, productive and draft live stock, and products, commodities, monetary resources for the fulfillment of its Statutory obligation (Art 6.). Also legal protection to cooperative were provided to sell to other enterprises, organizations and citizens, lease out, land and hand over free of change for temporary-use buildings, structures, equipments, transportation facilities, raw

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material etc. (Article 8). Interference in the economy and other activities of the cooperative by state or superior cooperative bodies were prohibited with certain exception by the law (Art 9).94

Therefore, the new cooperatives were different creatures altogether. They were projected as voluntary, genuine, free from official tutelage and control, and engaged in a wide variety of activities in competition with each other and with state enterprises, as in small scale manufacturer, services, trade, construction, even banking.

The new Law called for many of the large state and collective farms to become federation of 'small cooperative units, with cooperative service agencies operating as sub contractors to farms. They, would, thus replace the monopolized (and inefficient) state-run organizations responsible, among other things, for repairs, supplies, 'chemicalization', drainage and the like.

By the Jan 1991, various types of cooperatives increased in numbers. Including agricultural cooperative, there were 245300 Cooperative of various kinds of operation, more than twice as many as a year previously. Most cooperative were small, but they employed a total work force of over 6 million and they

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paid considerably higher wage than the national average.\textsuperscript{95}

Despite the various packages of agricultural reform situation did not improve and it went on deteriorating further. There were several reasons behind the 'agricultural failure which Gorbachev himself noted at the Central Committee Plenum in March 1989. He explained that they were still experiencing shortage of all kinds of farming produce. Large quantities of grain, meat, fruit, vegetables, sugar and other staples had to be purchased from abroad. The USSR still lagged behind other developed countries in its labour efficiency yields and livestock productivity, as well as the diversity and quality of its food stuffs and gap was widening rather than narrowing.\textsuperscript{96} This situation developed due to millions of hectares of land had been lost through industrial construction or mismanagement and the fertilities of the land that remained had been falling in most regions as Gorbachev explained. At least 20 percent of all agricultural produce was lost because of inefficiency of various kind, and in the case of some products the losses were as high as 40 percent. Problem of this kind had long been recognised and the agricultural sector had received massive injections of machinery, fertilizer

\textsuperscript{95} Stephen, n.1, p.119.

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid, p.115.
and other resources. However, no real solution of the problem could be found despite the country's enormous agricultural potential.97 (see table 2)

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In June 1989 the new Supreme Soviet went one step further and enacted legislation to allow families, groups and even individuals, to acquire long term leases on the land.98 The ultimate logic of the collective contact and lease schemes called for the abandonment of Sovkhozy and Kolkhozy. However,

97. Ibid, p.115.

Gorbachev was reluctant to abandonment of Kolkhozy and Sovkhozy. In a speech Gorbachev observed: "we are moving towards a not-so distant time when collective and state forms will become essentially cooperative of independent primary work collectives."99

Organizational Reform:

From 1985 onward the reform in organizational structure of economic management were carried out. In 1985 itself five governmental agencies responsible for the management of Soviet food economy - the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Meat and Dairy Products, Ministry of Fruits and Vegetables, the Ministry of Food Industry, and the USSR State Committee for the supply of Production Equipment for Agriculture - were abolished and merged in new superagency - the USSR State Agro-Industrial Committee (Gosagroprom).100 During 1986-87, the absorption of 'technologically-related ministries' continued, with the setting up of a USSR State Committee for Construction, A Bureau for Machine Building, and the Bureau for the Fuel and Energy complex.101 The number of Republican Ministries


100. For detailed study of the November 1985 reform of the USSR Food Economy, see Valentin Litvin, The Soviet Agro Industrial Complex Structure and Performance, (Boulder, 1987).

was reduced from 800 to 600 in March 1989 and over 1000 main directories and directorates were abolished. Nine All-Union Ministries and departments were closed down by March 1989. And at the first meeting of the reorganized Supreme Soviet in June of that year, Prime Minister Ryzhkov announced that the economic Union-Republic ministries would be abolished and their activities transferred to the republics. Furthermore, the number of All-Union ministries and committees was reduced. The number of ministries dealing with Industry, Building, Transport, Agriculture and Defence was curtailed from fifty to thirty two. In addition, twenty five committees, bureaus, and ministries dealing with control and other matter of state (finance, foreign affairs, prices, economic reform, and so on were constituted. It was also decided that Gosplan would, in future, plan not for individual industry branches but for 'group of branches.' New State Production Associates were being set up to integrate organizations and firms involved in the entire chain of research and development, production


and marketing for particular products. Enhanced authority and responsibilities were accorded to the republics and to local Soviets which had been instructed to establish special Economic Department to carry them out. Thus attempt were made to breakout from the centrally controlled economic structure.

**Problems and obstacle in Economic Reform:**

Though the economic reforms seemed to be vary radical in nature but the overall record was very poor. Some reforms measures were yet to be implemented and some new had to be enacted. Many of the difficulties the economy had experienced were the result of exogenous factors of various kinds. Heavy losses were incurred by a series of natural disasters of various kinds of which the most important were the Chernobyl nuclear explosion of April 1986 and Armenian earthquake of December 1988. In both clematis 8 billion and 8,500 million rubles respectively were reported to had been lost due to damage of property and many more death-toll.106

Most of the measures remained on paper. Perhaps the most conspicuous example of this kind was the state orders that were supposed to replace ministerial directives under the Law on the State Enterprises. ,It

soon became apparent that the new law was largely a dead letter: ministries continued to issue directive but simply renamed them (goszakazy) state orders, and these directives in turn continued to account for the overwhelming share of output.

More generally, there was discrepancy between the introduction of structural reform and attempts to accelerate the performance of the economy by marketization.

Another problem was the perpetuation of the existing old centralized administrative methods notwithstanding the new nomenklatura that was employed.107 Many other elements of the reforms programme remained formal: the election of enterprise management, for instance was heavily influenced by the local party and state authorities, and there was often a tendency to vote for easy-going candidates who aimed for lower targets and higher prices rather than for the energetic and purposeful executives.108

Another respect in which the reform made little difference in practice was the reduction of administrative staff. Attempts to reduce the staffing of central ministries, however, could not produce the

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desired results. In fact administrative apparatus had increased in number by 122,000 between 1985 and 1988, despite assurances to the contrary. Great resistance came from these large number of Party and state functionaries. They had special reason for resisting the reforms, because they regarded them as a challenge to their power and privileges in many cases.

Among the officials, greatest resistance came from managerial personnel. In his address to 19th Party Conference, Gorbachev said that "the economic reform made much better headway if conservatism had not been so tenacious in the managerial apparatus. The method of command and administrative fiat are hanging on doggedly. As the reform is being put into effect, we tangibly feel the resistance of the forces of inertia, this leading all too often to halfway or compromise decisions, and sometimes to errors."

Due to the various lacunae inherent in the economic reform measures and resistance by the state and party officials, the already bad state of Soviet economy gradually deteriorated to worse. The Soviet national income was almost stagnant in the first four

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years of Perestroika, and after that it began to fall. By 1991 economy suffered from such large imbalances that the situation no longer remained reparable. In 1991, GNP fell 10 percent during first half of the year compared with the correspondingly period of 1990. Industrial output dropped by 6 percent and consumer related goods decline of 3 percent. 111 The general availability of basic food stuffs fell from 90 percent of demand in 1983 to 22 percent in 1989 and 11 percent in the 1990. Out of 1200 basic consumer goods, 96-97 percent were essentially in total shortage or never available for sale.112.

It is against this background of deteriorating economic situation, a political process of differentiation was taking place within the reform wings of the party apparatus. Those who had previously shared a commitment to reform the Stalinist system now polarised between those such as Yeltsin and Edward Shevardnadze, advocating the dismantling of the command economy and one-party rule and its replacement by Western style liberal-capitalism, and those who come to believe that the continued dominance of nomenklatura required a political clamp-down.


Economic failure was exacerbated by political fragmentation. The central control of the economy was undermined not merely by the effects of its own reforms but by the increased self-assertiveness of the republican government, now generally controlled by forces hostile to Communist Party. The Union Treaty to have been signed by Gorbachev and nine republican Presidents on August 20, 1991 was intended, to accommodate nationalist aspirations and economic interest within the framework of Perestroika. But many at the centre apprehended that it would simply legitimize the disintegration process of the union and August 1991 Putsch was the result of such apprehensions.

Against the backdrop of deteriorating economic situation, the Soviet regime tried to become more authoritarian and the August Putsch represented nothing but an attempt to manage and prevent the ongoing marketization and liberalization in economy in particular, and keep intact the command administrative system, in general.