Chapter 1
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Soviet Public Administration As in 1985

Introduction

The Soviet Union went through a period of reforms and crises for about six years before it finally disintegrated in December 1991. These reforms, now widely known as perestroika, were initiated by the then General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev from March 1985 onwards, and since then these reforms triggered off a series of crises, a process which eventually ended with the dissolution of the Soviet system and the state.

This process of reform or perestroika in fact turned out to be a process of disintegration of the Soviet Union. There may be a number of opinions on this process, but with the benefit of hindsight, it can be safely said that perestroika process indeed caused the disintegration of the Soviet Union. As we are not concerned here on examining the process of perestroika we need not debate on its pros and cons. However, the process of disintegration began to affect almost all aspects of Soviet life since its very beginning in March 1985. Hence, Soviet Public Administration could not have kept itself aloof from this
historic process; in fact, being an integral part of the Soviet system it also went through a series of crises and instability, finally leading to its own collapse in 1991. It is precisely with this momentous development against the process of disintegration of the Soviet Union that we are focused here in our work.

We propose to begin our study in this chapter by critically examining the state of Soviet Public Administration as Gorbachev found it when he was elected General Secretary of CPSU in March 1985; in other words the state of Public Administration in Soviet Union on the eve of perestroika, that is to say at the beginning of the process of disintegration of the Soviet Union.

However, before we take up this exercise it may well be relevant at this stage to delineate some general and specific features of Public Administration in a society and to specify its vital role in it.

Public Administration plays a vital role in every country irrespective of the form of government or the kind of society. It is the instrument of the government to ensure smooth and efficient functioning of society. “Public Administration has come to signify primarily the organization, personnel, practices and procedures essential to effective performance of the civilian functions entrusted to
principles which characterize the institution of Public Administration but comparison between various countries shows that there is no uniformity with regard to its organization and practice. Rather it shows that notwithstanding a manifest similarity in formal organizations, their informal practices and behavioural patterns possess considerable diversities, each being shaped by its societal culture. Context specificity is thus a marked feature of Public Administration.

Development and change are the key words today in every society and Public Administration is of pivotal importance as an instrument of change and development. "No plan can succeed if its administrative implications are not fully realized and commensurate administrative machinery not provided. A country's progress is thus largely determined by the quality of its Public Administration." Prof. W. B. Donham emphasizing the importance of administration asserts that "if our civilization fails it will be mainly because of a breakdown of administration." This requires that the Public Administrative structure

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4 Quoted in Sharma and Sadana, n. 2, p. 51.
in every country is to be equipped thoroughly to implement policies effectively, work as an agent of change and development, and to see that it does not become an impediment to growth.

Max Weber recognized bureaucracy as the characteristic form of Public Administration for a state with extended territorial sovereignty and thus developed, what has become the standard definition of this form of organization. According to him, “the bureaucratic type of administrative organization...is, from a purely technical point of view, capable of attaining highest degree of efficiency and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of carrying out imperative control over human beings. It is superior to any other form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline, and in its reliability.”

In spite of these features that characterize the bureaucracy, it has often been projected as being dysfunctional and inefficient, stalling development and progress in a given society. A notion that prevailed widely was that the bureaucracy needs to be eliminated. But, in the face of such criticism Weber opines that:

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it would be sheer illusion to think for a moment that continuous administration work can be carried out in any field except by means of officials working in offices. The whole pattern of everyday life is cut to fit this framework. For bureaucratic administration is, other things being equal, always, from a formal, technical point of view, the most rational type. For the needs of mass administration, it is completely indispensable.7

However, the fact that certain problems plague the bureaucracy cannot be denied. Yet, the primary understanding of bureaucracy in terms of functions and purposes remains positive. This could be attributed to the lack of a better alternative or the increasing responsibilities of the government. More so, the development in different areas in a society finds the government assuming greater responsibility and this gives the administration considerable power and authority. In most countries where the control system is not effective, the administrative excesses go unchecked. However, an efficient administrative system, combined with an effective control system, is ideal for the development of the country. Against the above general context, we now turn to look critically at Soviet Public Administration as found in March 1985. This background of Soviet Public Administration may help us in comprehending the enormity of tasks ahead of Gorbachev from 1985.

7 Ibid.
Soviet Public Administration: The Background

Structure and Functions

To study Public Administration in the Soviet Union it is important to understand the distinctive setting of the country. Ideological correctness was of utmost importance in the Soviet Union and the Communist Party was resolutely committed to serve ideology. This was evident in all its policy-making and policy implementation process. “In any viable political system the process of decision-making is an important ingredient of formulation and execution of policies. However, the qualitative distinction of decision-making process in the Soviet system lies in the fact that the inputs in this process are shaped in accordance with the ideological orientation of the system.”

Ever since the inception of Soviet Union, after the revolution of October 1917, the country has been characteristically different in every aspect from all other countries. The preamble to the USSR constitution of 1977 states that the Soviet state created by the Great October Socialist Revolution, was a “new type of state and the basic instrument for the defence of revolutionary gains and the construction

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of socialism and communism.” In such a context, it declared “The Communist Party of the Soviet Union is the leading and guiding force of Soviet society, the nucleus of its political system and of state and public organizations.... Armed with the Marxist-Leninist teaching, the Communist Party determines general prospects for the development of society and the lines of the USSR’s domestic and foreign policy, directs the creative activity of the people....”

Building a socialist and communist Soviet Union being the ultimate goal of the 1917 revolution, the leaders visualized the Communist Party as an instrument to this end. The Communist Party committed to advance the Marxist-Leninist ideology was thus vested with all power. The supremacy of the Communist Party over all things in the state formed the base for the political, institutional, functional, societal and every other norm prevalent in the Soviet Union. Thus, even in the area of Public Administration there was a sharp distinction between the Soviet Union and those found in other countries. The size and scope of the Soviet apparatus, its responsibility for managing the state-owned economy and other distinctive features, set it apart from

10 Article 6, Ibid., p. 2.
the more conventional administrative structures found in constitution systems, though these themselves cannot be classified into one group. The factors that made Soviet Public Administration so unique different also made it difficult for one to identify or label any particular structure as an integral part of the Public Administration. To a great or lesser extent at every level the Communist Party, the Supreme Soviet and the Government were involved in one or the other aspect of Public Administration.

Public Administration in the Soviet Union encompassed such a wide range of areas that every activity in the society fell within its purview. "Every branch of economy and every form of social expression, from art, music and letters to sports and the circus are subject to administrative regulation and direction." This made the administrative system a very large empire, extremely powerful and prominent. The economic sector was at the core of Soviet society and everything was ordered towards maximum economic output. Thus the administration in Soviet Union was mainly concerned with managing the economy. Kosygin's report on 'The Council of Ministers Law':

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the USSR Supreme Soviet defined the powers of the USSR Council of Ministers, with regard to economic management, as that of bringing all administrative activity in line with the growing demands of the country’s economic development. It was this interest that had always been instrumental in directing the formation of the administrative structures, its procedures, functions, priorities and such other things. It was also an important factor that in socialist systems, the concept of public and private administration did not exist. Socialist ownership of the means of production, in the form of state ownership, was also the foundation of the USSR’s economic system. So all administration in the Soviet Union was, in this sense, Public Administration.

The Soviet Government was at the apex of the pyramid of the Public Administrative system of the USSR. According to the USSR constitution, the USSR Council of Ministers - the USSR government, was the supreme executive and administrative body of state power in the USSR. The Council of Ministers was headed by a Chairman and others in the Council included First Vice-Chairmen and Vice-Chairman, Union and Union-Republic Ministers and Chairmen of

14 Article 10, “The New USSR Constitution”, n. 9, p. 3.
State Committees of USSR. The Chairmen of the Council of Ministers of Union-Repooics were ex-officio members. Sometimes the heads of other USSR agencies and organizations were also part of the Council of Ministers.16 Though the Council of Ministers was formed by the Supreme Soviet at a joint meeting of the Council of the Union and the Council of the Nationalities, every ministerial position was on the nomenklatura list and almost all ministers were members of the party.17 The Presidium of the Council of Ministers, a select few from the Council, functioned as a permanent agency of the USSR Council of Ministers to resolve questions relating to ensuring the guidance of the national economy and other questions of state administration.18

The tasks that lay within the purview of the Council of Ministers were extensive. The other structures of the Public administrative system were hierarchically ordered below the Council of Ministers and every other body was subjected to its jurisdiction. These included various ministries, state committees, commissions - permanent and temporary, special agencies etc.19

16 Article 129, Ibid.
The USSR ministries were central agencies of state administration and exercised control and guidance over the branches of administration under their charge. They were organized as All-Union ministries and Union-Republican ministries. The former worked directly from Moscow or through agencies created by them, while the latter performed through corresponding republican ministries. The ministries were mostly organized on the lines of various economic sectors with one ministry for each sector. This accounted for a large number of ministries. Each ministry was a massive bureaucratic organization and employed one or two thousand personnel in its central and regional offices. The ministries were divided into administrations and departments for efficiency. However, orders came from the ministry right down to the factory, farm or enterprise.

State Committees were also central agencies of state administration and carried out interbranch administration. These were also classified as USSR All-Union State Committees and USSR Union-Republic State Committees. They were assigned spheres of administration and were responsible for its state and development.

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20 Article 19, Ibid., p. 23.
State Commissions were not bound usually to any particular section of the economy but coordinated tasks across the lines and thus differed in their activities with the ministries.

Following the ministries and the State Committees there were also other agencies under the jurisdiction of the USSR Council of Ministers. For instance, the USSR State Bank, USSR Central Statistical Administration and other Committees, Chief administrations and departments which dealt with economic, social, cultural and defence construction were under the USSR Council of Ministers.\textsuperscript{23}

The Presidium of the USSR Council of Ministers had permanent commissions and the Council of Ministers decided for these commissions on matters regarding their tasks, functions and procedures. There were also temporary commissions and other working agencies which were formed by the Council of Ministers as required at specific times of need.\textsuperscript{24}

With regard to the functions of the USSR Council of Ministers, it was empowered to resolve all questions of state administration and to form committees, chief administrations and departments as

\textsuperscript{23} Article 27, Ibid., p. 24.

\textsuperscript{24} Article 30, Ibid.
required. It also coordinated, directed and exercised systematic control over the work of the ministries, State Committees and other agencies and had the right to suspend or annul the execution of resolutions and orders of these organs. The Council of Ministers could make proposals on the formation and abolition of the USSR ministries and State Committees. The Council of Ministers was responsible and accountable to the USSR Supreme Soviet and it made regular report on its work to the Supreme Soviet. The Administrative office of the USSR Council of Ministers which consisted of departments and other structural subdivisions, assisted the government to fulfil its functions by supplying information and monitoring tasks.

The main principle that governed the methods of functioning of these organs was democratic centralism. In doing so, it combined the centralized resolution on questions of state administration with the development of initiative by republic and local agencies. Not just in the administration but democratic centralism was a cardinal principle.

26 Article 135, Ibid.
27 Article 134, Ibid.
28 Article 122, Ibid.
29 Article 130, Ibid.
31 Article 3, Ibid., p. 20.
of the Soviet state on which all its activities were based. It combined centralized leadership with local initiative and creative activeness with democratic responsibility of every state agency and official for the assigned task. Democratic centralism was deemed to ensure better control at every level of the structure.

There were major differences that could be observed in the personnel policies with regard to recruitment, training etc., in comparison with general principles followed in other countries. This could be attributed to the system of administration in the Soviet Union. Recruitment to all positions in every area, be it government, party, defence or unions, were primarily handled by the system of nomenklatura. Nomenklatura comprised a list of important positions which were directly or indirectly prepared and controlled by the secretariats of the Communist Party at different levels of the political and territorial-administrative structure of the Soviet system. Training again did not form part of the regular system of the administrative structure because of the special method of recruitment. Generally, there had been no particular training institutes to go to after their

recruitment to equip them before they started their job of administering the country. But during Brezhnev’s period, in the 1970’s some specialized institutions were set up to assist new entrants for the task of Public Administration. Some administrative personnel were also recruited directly from specialized technical institutes. Others entered at mid career either by job transfer or on the basis of open competition through applications.34 Thus, these various options and methods of joining the Public Administration, in practical terms, limited the need for training as such.

Legacy - Ideological and Historical

Lenin and the others who led the revolution of 1917 were inspired by the writings of Karl Marx. In tracing the development of Public Administration in the Soviet Union, it is thus imperative for us to take cognizance of Marx’s views on bureaucracy. In his writing The Civil War in France, Marx spoke of the beginning of the bureaucracy and other state organs and their transformation in the course of time. “Society had created its own organs to look after its common interests, originally by simple division of labour. But these organs, at whose head was the state power, had in the course of time, in the pursuance of

34 Smith, n. 21, p. 100.
their own special interests, transformed themselves from servants of society into masters of society.”

For Marx, bureaucracy thus was a characteristic institution of the state machinery and the state was, “an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another...” It combined within its fold both the instruments of rule and administrators who served not the society but their own interests. The pretense of bureaucracy everywhere was good governance and new opportunities, but its methods of operation were clothed in secrecy. According to Marx, this only resulted in “the formation of a separate class of administrative officers, in whose hands the chief power is concentrated, and which stands in opposition against all other classes. It is the barbarian form of middle-class rule.”

The large number of officials on the rolls of the bureaucracy was another practical problem. In The Eleventh Bureau of Louis Bonaparte referring to this problem of numbers Marx writes “The executive power with its enormous bureaucratic and military organization, with its extensive and artificial state machinery, with a host of officials

numbering half a million, besides an army of another half million, this appalling parasitic body, which enmeshes the body of French society like a net and chokes all its pores."  

The large numbers in bureaucracy did not help ease the tasks of administration but rather throttled development. Marx did not see anything positive in the bureaucracy and his writings exposed the negative impact it had on the society. His view of the administrative structure was more of distrust and skepticism. With such an understanding, and in the context of a revolution Marx's opinion was that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes." Change definitely meant the destruction of this structure. Therefore the course of action would be "that in order not to lose its only just conquered supremacy, this working class must... do away with all the old repressive machinery...." A society, therefore, after revolution, was required to wipe out all traces of the bureaucratic element which divided the classes and suppressed the people.

Lenin also subscribed to Marx's view on the state system and the measures to combat the situation after revolution. According to Lenin:

Abolishing the bureaucracy at once everywhere and completely is out of question. It is a utopia. But to smash the old bureaucratic machine and to begin immediately to construct a new one that will make possible the gradual abolition of all bureaucracy - this is not a utopia, it is the experience of the Commune, the direct and immediate task of the revolutionary proletariat.  

However, soon after the revolution, Lenin, on forming the government in Russia, realized that it was not possible for a group of revolutionary party workers to administer the new state. The party did not have skilled or experienced administrators. Moreover, it could not dispense with the specialists and bureaucrats from the old regime and so recruited them to service but surrounded them with party and police controls in order to ensure their loyalty.  

Ordinary people were also roped in to administer the country. The popular slogan during the revolution, 'Power to the Soviets' meant "allowing the majority of the people initiative and independence not only in the election of deputies, but also in state administration."  

Lenin, in the article, *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*, writes that "our aim is to draw the whole

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42 Fainsod, n. 12, p. 389.
of the poor into the practical work of administration.” 44 Involving the masses in administration was thought necessary for consolidating the gains of the revolution and building socialism. As a result of the socialist character of the Soviet government, for the first time a start was “made by the entire population in learning the art of administration in beginning to administer.” 45 However, they were not skilled in tasks of administration and Lenin was fully aware of the fact. In such a context, Lenin, in answering the question, ‘Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?’ says “we are not utopians. We know that an unskilled labourer or a cook cannot immediately go on with the job of state administration.... We demand that training in the work of state administration be conducted by class-conscious workers and soldiers... a beginning be made at once in training all the working people, all the poor for this work.” 46 Training, therefore, was mandatory for Lenin, for efficiency in the administration of the country.

In consolidating socialism, just as much the involvement of the working and exploited class in administering the country was trusted.

46 Lenin, n. 43, pp. 72-73.
so also 'discipline and self-discipline' of these classes were equally stressed to prevent deviation from the goal of advancing socialism. To this end, new courts of law, established after the revolution with the participation of all people, were to be instruments to enforce 'discipline and self-discipline' of the people. These courts, if necessary, were permitted to use force to ensure that the principles of the Soviet system were not violated or discarded. Contrasting with the development of bureaucracy and features that came to characterize it, 'discipline and self-discipline' were crucial factors that the Soviet administrative structure had to practice as preventive measure against traversing the bureaucratic path. The Party which led revolution thus started to play a leading role in the Soviet society and its position continued to be strengthened and enlarged over the years.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in terms of its power, authority and the scope of its work, had no equivalent elsewhere in the world. It played a determining role in every aspect of the society. Party constituted the cream of the society who were committed to serve the country and as many as one in every fifteen persons was a member of the Communist Party. This made possible

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the presence of a party member in all places of work. Every level of
government, every institution and office was either headed or
supervised by party functionaries. The party was responsible for
making sure the government administered policy correctly, efficiently
and honestly. 49 The role that the party played in administration of the
country was of a comprehensive nature, beginning with determining
the policy, supervising implementation and controlling the activities of
the different organs. “State organs are regarded as one of the
‘transmission belts’ between the party and the masses.”50

In multiparty systems the administration is required to be
politically neutral. However, in the Soviet Union, the Communist Party
being the only one, political neutrality was not an issue in Public
Administration. Administration in all fields was considered as a means
to further party interests and ideologies. 51 In fact, majority of those in
administration were party members. This was possible because, the
method of recruitment, nomenklatura was peculiar to Soviet Union as
observed earlier. It was basically a method of ensuring that people in
administration were either party members or those approved by the

49 Baradat, n. 17, p. 105.
51 Fainsod, n. 10, p. 387.
party. It was also an effective way of control over administration by the party.

As a "guiding force" the party maintained a vast network of permanent offices at every level of the administrative-territorial structure so as to enable the CPSU leadership to consistently guide the country. The functioning of parallel party structures similar to the administration at every level was another distinctive method of control over the administrative system by the Communist Party. This was possible since "all the three known categories of USSR ministries (All-Union, Union-Republican and State Committee) have an interlocking system of linkages with their counterparts in the secretariat of the CPSU." The Secretariat of the party was established in 1919 and was assigned with the task of coordinating various aspects. However, it soon "developed into the administrative nerve centre of the party and more and more assumed control over all party activities and policies." The Secretariat was the most powerful body within the CPSU after the Politburo. According to the rules of the CPSU, the Secretariat--an elected body of the party--was charged with the 'selection of cadres'

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53 Imam, n. 8, p. 340.
and the ‘verification of the fulfilment of party decisions’ These two responsibilities of the Secretariat in turn enabled the Party to have control and direction over the administrative structure. In fact, top leaders of the party did not depend on the government for information and policy proposals. It was made available to them through the central party apparatus which was the staff agency working under the direction of the Secretariat. The party and state officials played multiple roles by being part of various bodies simultaneously. This ensured that in policy-making and implementation there was a combination of practical administrative expertise and party guidance. Such overlapping helped better communication. The party had thus become an indispensable part of the administrative structure at all levels overshadowing every function.

Over the years the various events that happen in a state, like the leadership changes, the reforms that are brought about, methods used to implement them etc., make a powerful and definite impact on the different institutions in the state. The Public Administration in the Soviet Union also had been subject to all this. The beginning that the Soviet Union made in 1917 was not easy. As seen earlier, the task of

55 Theen, n. 33, p. 35.
56 Smith, n. 19, p. 108.
administration in the party hands was not viable and required the services of those who had been employed earlier coupled with strict vigil over them. This was not the only problem that Lenin had to contend with. The country faced the brunt of the First World War, its own revolutionary change and the civil war which ensued. In Lenin's words it spelled, "calamities, privation, sacrifice and intense want on a scale unparalleled in world history." Gearing up to meet this exigency required extraordinary measures. The party worked out a number of measures which later came to be known as War Communism. There was a large-scale nationalization and all enterprises were brought under the control of VSNKh (Supreme Council of the National Economy). However, this caused several problems such as centralization and bureaucratization. It was discussed in the VIIIth Party Congress in 1919 and in the same year a body called the People's Commissariat for State Control was established to check corruption and bureaucratization. This body was renamed as the Workers and Peasants Inspectorate (Rabkrin) in February 1920. To bring everything under the central authority at once was not what the party intended to do but it was

59 Ibid., p. 37.
forced upon it by the situation at hand. It is possibly from here one can trace the centralization that has characterized Soviet Institutions.

New Economic Policy (NEP) was another important measure that was adopted at the Tenth Congress by Lenin. NEP sought to replace requisition with a tax that was progressive and gave much freedom to the peasants to manage their produce at their own discretion.60 This was a reversal from the methods followed during the period of War Communism. Some of those who welcomed the introduction of War Communism as the beginning of socialism did not favour NEP which they felt encouraged capitalism and stalled the progress of socialism in Soviet Russia.61 However, for Lenin it had the distant target of strengthening the gains of the revolution. NEP was cashing in "the enthusiasm engendered by the Great Revolution on personal interest, on a personal stake, on economic accountability."62 On the whole, NEP brought much relief to the peasants, increased their initiative and removed some bureaucratic hurdles. The

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61 McCauley, n. 58, p. 48.
administrative structure thus started acquiring traits one after another which were to characterize it for years to come. Most of them were the result of some measure adopted to remedy a particular situation. They, however, continued to be practised even after the country managed to tide over those emergencies.

However, the period that Lenin had at his disposal was too short to enable him direct the Soviet Union fully in the path as envisioned by him and the other leaders of the revolution. The coming of Stalin to power marked the beginning of the drastic changes that Soviet Union was to experience as regards the ideological motivations, institutional formations and functional or working principles in the country. The early years of Stalin marked the ‘totalitarian break through’ which was the effort to destroy the basic institutions of the old order and construct the framework for the new. The focus of these years included collectivization, industrialization, purges, Cultural Revolution etc., all of which left indelible marks on the framework of this administrative system. The later years brought terror as the characteristic feature of the system with the party losing its importance, the personalization of leadership and the growth of the secret police.

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64 Ibid., p. 70.
Though NEP was introduced by Lenin, he could not preside over it for long and the policy continued in Stalin’s time. NEP brought its share of success but by 1927-28 the peasants were unwilling to sell the grain at official price. The NEP traders sold grain at exorbitant prices which led to them being taxed arbitrarily and soon to the confiscation of their grain. NEP lost its old meaning and there ensued a reversal to the time of requisitions. Collectivization can be said to have started off from here. During NEP, the peasants were encouraged to join collective farms but subsequent events soon gave way to forced collectivization. Farms were collectivized against peasant’s wishes and by 1936 about 90% of all farms were collectivized. The landed Kulak, as a class, was targeted at and liquidated. Collectivization perpetuated violence and injustice as one class was set up against the other. Following alongside was industrialization which aimed at rapid, enhancement of industrial construction. It overlooked consumer goods industry and priority was given for investment in capital goods industry for which the focus was large-scale rather than small-scale industry. The high point of Stalin’s

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66 Sakwa, n. 48, p. 45.
67 Churchward, n. 50, p. 61.
reign was the Great Purge in the last years of 1930s and the early years of 1940. There was an increase in police power, and terror became an integral part of the Soviet system during these years. Millions of people were arbitrarily arrested, tried and sentenced to exile, forced labour or death.68

The Soviet political system also witnessed major changes during the Second World War. War requirements resulted in several new administrative agencies being formed, which played a crucial role in managing the needs of the war and the economy. The State Defence Committee assumed great importance during this period.69 Administrative bodies thus assumed the role of both administering the war and the economy. The post-war period was also significant part of Stalin’s rule. The ravages of war and the changes brought about during the war continued to influence the social, political and economic situation in the Soviet Union. The State Defence Committee was dissolved and the functions were divided among different comissariats. Authority passed from military to civilian control.70 The war period saw increased power in the hands of the bureaucrats. The

68 Ibid., p. 64.
69 Fainsod, n. 12, pp. 392-93.
70 McCauley, n. 58, p. 131.
increase in the number of ministries in the post-war period was also
the result of the bureaucrats' desire to occupy higher positions and
wield more power.\footnote{Ibid., p. 134.} However, there were also attempts to reduce the
number of ministries either by consolidating or abolishing ministries. It
was in this period during spring 1946 that the Council of People's
Commissions came to be known as the Council of Ministers and
People's Commissars became ministers.\footnote{Romanovsky N. V. and Zafar Imam, \textit{Russia under High Stalinism} (New Delhi, 1995), p. 33.} The ravages of the war and
the changes brought in during the war continued to influence the
situation in the Soviet Union. The country could have accepted radical
changes at this time, but Stalin did not initiate a new beginning,
instead, "after a brief spell of only a few months reorientation,
resumed political lines based on traditional Stalinist values and
stereotypes."\footnote{Ibid., pp. 29-30.}

Stalin's period can be seen as one in which the goal of
development and enhancement was primarily quantitative. The targets
of the plans were beyond the possible capacity of the country at that
time. His desire to make Soviet Union a world power knew no bounds
and goals were repeatedly increased. This led to arbitrary programmes and decisions unsuited for the growth of the country. Stalin was also inspired by self-perpetuation to safeguard his position, which may explain his policies. Commenting on this aspect Fainsod says:

The system of administration which developed under Stalin was shaped to a very considerable extent by his own personality – his paranoiac suspicion, his fear of rivals, his distrust of those around him, and his desire to hold all the strings of power in his own hands. In his desire for total power, he evolved a system of competing and overlapping bureaucratic hierarchies in which he depended on the party apparatus and the police to penetrate and watch each other and made use of both to control the administration as well as all other branches of Soviet life.

This did the country no good but rather much harm. Extreme centralization also hampered economic growth. The accumulated ills from Stalin’s period only served in providing the right momentum for the downward spiral of the Soviet society. The corrective measures initiated by the successive leaders did not effect major changes. In fact, “the historical roots of the disintegration of the USSR in 1991 may well be traced back to the Stalinist system.”

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74 McCauley, n. 58, p. 72.
76 Romanovsky and Imam, n. 72, p. 5.
Khrushchev, coming on the heels of Stalin, was also highly ambitious with a goal to overtake the United States by the 1980s. However, Khrushchev made a break with the Stalinist methods of terror and coercion. The high point of this was de-Stalinization starting with the secret speech denouncing Stalin at the close of the 20th Party Congress in February 1956. The achievements of de-Stalinization were the termination of the many years of mass terror, curtailment of police power, millions of prisoners being freed and curbing administrative and bureaucratic excesses. Though many things had been changed and reverted for the better, it was also seen partly as Khrushchev’s efforts to retain leadership and consolidate power, not just to improve matters.77

The years of Khrushchev in power can be seen as one in which there were constant changes and reforms, which soon proved to be ineffective leading to new reforms again, thus providing no scope for stability in governance. Khrushchev believed that his strong area was agriculture and during Stalin’s time he had introduced a number of reforms and gained reputation as one who understood agriculture. This image contributed to his advancement.78 This was precisely the reason

77 Sakwa, n. 39, p. 72.
or the emphasis that he laid on agriculture introducing new programmes and changing course from time to time. Virgin Lands scheme was successful and grain output increased initially but soon there was a reversal due to land erosion and other natural calamities. In the same vein came Corn Campaign, an effort to enliven the live stock but this was forceful and in comparison was not much different from Stalin's forced collectivization. Machine Tractor Stations had steadily increased in number since 1929 and they assisted the Kolkhozes for mechanized services. In 1958, Khrushchev dismantled the machine tractor stations which caused much inconvenience. The equipment was transferred to the Kolkhozes and this measure ackfired and there was severe economic strain.79

Khrushchev's period also witnessed several institutional changes. It was not a one-time course again, but there were many reversions back and forth. In May 1955, the functions of Gosplan were divided. It retained long range planning while short-term planning was entrusted with the State Economic Commission (Gosekonomkomissia). But in May 1957, Gosekonomkomissia was abolished only for a new body, State Scientific-Economic Council (Gosekonomsvet) to be formed April 1960 with the charge of long-term planning. Now Gosplan

Ibid., p. 85.
came to be responsible for short-term planning and supervising annual plan fulfillment. Soon the supervision of annual plan was transferred to a new agency, National Economic Council (Sovnarkhoz). In 1957, over 140 All-Union, Union-Republican and Republican Ministries were eliminated restructuring the ministerial system of industrial management. It was replaced by 105 regional Economic Councils (Sovnarkhozy) to control all the agencies of the abolished ministries that were still retained. According to Fainsod:

This root-and-branch assault on the ministerial pattern of industrial management had its origin in abuses that were endemic to the system as it had operated for many years. These included the excessive concentration of authority in Moscow, the suppression of local initiative, the red tape and delay that characterized communication with the enterprises in the field, the difficulty of achieving rational cooperation among enterprises in the same locality which were controlled by different ministries and the tendency of each ministry to seek to free itself of dependence on other ministries by building a self-sufficient empire of ancillary enterprises that could not be justified on grounds of efficiency alone.

By decentralizing authority, Khrushchev sought to address these issues. However, this move too had its share of problems. Some of which were, “Sovnarkhoz staffs showed a tendency to proliferate in

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80 Churchward, n. 50, p. 149.
81 Fainsod, n. 12, p. 395.
much the same way as the old ministries... localism,... diverting capital funds from high-priority projects to finance local extravagances... autocratic tendencies...."82 among other things.

However, in 1963 there was further reorganization. This process thus repeated itself. A major reform was carried out in the party in 1962 when it was divided into industrial and agricultural sectors at the provincial and lower levels. Commenting on this Zafar Imam says:

Khrushchev's zeal for reforms began to go out of hands when he sought to undermine the pivotal role of top party elite by splitting the party apparatus in two, industrial and agriculture. The resistance of the party elite in practice weakened both new branches of the party as well as the entire establishment as a whole. This setback was perhaps one of the main reasons for the fall of Khrushchev in October 1964.83

Thus Khrushchev set in motion one reform after another. Most of these reforms were unilateral decisions which bypassed the members of the Central Committee Presidium. They were rooted in good intentions but the speed of the transformations led to negative consequences.84 These quietly paved the way for the ouster of Khrushchev in 1964.

82 Ibid., p. 396.
84 Medvedev and Medvedev, n. 78, p. 143.
The installation of Brezhnev as the leader of the USSR was in revolt against the leadership of Khrushchev. As seen, Khrushchev's was a period of erratic reforms and there was no respite from the uncertainties and instability that ensued in the country since 1917. Brezhnev's rule was therefore a response to the need for stability and security. There was no major reform since 1964. Brezhnev maintained status quo and worked through consensus. He advocated for the enhancement of the role of the party and for reverting to the more traditional forms of party organization. During Brezhnev's period, most of Khrushchev's reforms were reversed. The party bifurcation at all levels was repealed. So also the Committee of Party-State Control was dismantled and in its place came the Committee of People's Control, the role of which was limited to state matters and not to the party. The rotation of the offices was also repealed from the party programmes. Learning from the mistakes of Khrushchev, Brezhnev did not alienate the bureaucrats and took the path of compromise rather than reform leading to the party bureaucracy and state bureaucracy establishing themselves. So Brezhnev brought

85 McCauley, n. 58, p. 215.
things to a position where everything would go smoothly and without much confusion. In spite of not effecting major changes, there was a record economic growth and also achievements in domestic and economic affairs, particularly during the first ten years of Brezhnev.88

In comparison to the leadership tenure of Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev, Andropov’s and Chernenko’s seemed like transition periods before Gorbachev could become the General Secretary of the CPSU. Andropov, however, wanted to make changes and bring in progress. His reforms were directed at disciplining the system, rooting out corruption and laying off a large number of unnecessary personnel.89 Andropov made a new start but could not carry forward much due to ill-health and short tenure. However, in retrospect it can be attributed to Andropov’s term, the impact that Chernenko could not undo and which created the basis for Gorbachev’s efforts.90

Chernenko’s elevation could be seen as a reaction once again from people who preferred few changes. As regards his health he did

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89 Sakwa, n. 48, p. 92.
not seem any healthier than Andropov, being 72 years of age at this point. Chernenko continued the Politburo’s policies begun by Andropov. At the same time he also went slow on Andropov’s efforts and in fact even reversed his last decision which sought to cut nearly 20% of the bureaucracy. Eventually however, the collegial leadership style, emphasis on discipline and economic efficiency that had emerged under Andropov continued to be so even under Chernenko. Chernenko’s deteriorating health prevented him from doing much and this provided an opportunity for Gorbachev to prove himself while chairing the Politburo sessions in his absence and strengthen his credentials in the leadership race.

The passing away of Chernenko in March 1985 brought for Gorbachev the rein of leadership without much delay. Gorbachev was comparatively younger than all his predecessors. However, in spite of Gorbachev’s youthfulness “the ruling establishment he inherited...was old,...perfectly designed to alienate men of ability and critical intelligence and deposit the business of government into the corrupt

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92 Doder, n. 90, p. 212.
93 Lane, n. 91, p. 308.
hands of a conservative bureaucracy. The great challenge Gorbachev faced was to harness all available talent and to fashion a new administration that could respond to political realities."

Moreover, the pre-Gorbachev period gave to Gorbachev's leadership accumulated problems, the dimensions of which eschewed any immediate remedy or easy solutions. The crisis situation in the country had stretched beyond the ability of the system to contain it and brought it to the brink of collapse. The crisis related primarily to economic stagnation together with other ills of explosion of the bureaucracy, extreme centralization, corruption, inefficiency, crime etc. These were not something which suddenly came upon USSR but which have been building up as observed in the analysis of the different leadership periods.

The situation as he found in March 1985 can be traced, probably from Brezhnev's period, if not earlier. Though there were significant improvements in agricultural output, standard of living and housing, there was no fundamental structural reform to sort out the accumulating economic problem. Brezhnev's "stable regime had produced an amazing proliferation of corruption, a cynicism that

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95 Doder, n. 90, p. 268.
96 Sakwa, n. 48, pp. 88-89.
undermined all enterprise. An air of stagnation, the timeless inertia of the bureaucracy - a crisis of spirit - all characterized a system that seemed to have accompanied its aging leaders into exhaustion and debility. The time that Andropov and Chernenko had at their disposal was too short to make any change in the existing situation, rather they only contributed to further decline.

The problem area in Soviet Union in 1985 was not confined to any one sector but had affected every other. There are various reasons that brought about such a situation. Gorbachev says:

The difficulties and problems of 70's and 80's did not signify some kind of crisis for socialism as a social and political system, but rather were the result of insufficient consistency in applying the principles of socialism, of departures from them and even distortions of them and of continued adherence to the methods and forms of social management that arose under specific historical conditions in the early stages of socialist development.

Leadership successions had their definite impact on the situation in the country. With no concrete succession guideline, every new leader who emerged had to spend considerable amount of time establishing himself firmly in power. This was done by way of assigning important

97 Doder, n. 90, p. 38.
positions to their loyalists and eliminating or removing old cadre or reversing the old policies. There was a time gap before the leader embarked on new decisions and concerns of the country.

The expanding bureaucracy was another major aspect that plagued the Soviet system. In comparison to the year 1975, the number of administrative personnel in the country in 1983 had increased by about three million. Bureaucracy, with the increased numbers, extended its tentacles of power far and wide. Involved in implementing the decrees, by the control and authority it exercised, it was capable of thwarting any initiative that did not comply with its own aims. The leadership’s success depended a great deal on the acceptance and support of the bureaucracy. Agriculture, an important part of the economy, was also failing so much so that, between 1975 and 1982 about one-quarter of all Soviet grain needs were met by imports, and in spite of enormous investment the agricultural output declined far below the plan levels during the years 1979 to 1982. The party’s role in the whole thing was also not minimal. The absolute power base, in

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100 Baruch A. Hazan, Gorbachev and His Enemies: The Struggle for Perestroika (Boulder, 1990), p. 213.

101 Martin Crouch, Revolution and Evolution: Gorbachev and Soviet Politics (New Delhi, 1990), p. 57.
spite of the initial mass support, inspired ideology and effective programmes, only gave way for the “inevitable degeneration of a revolutionary party into a conservative party.”

Though the years provided much scope for reform, there were very few reform initiatives and the fact that real change was delayed was the result of the “conservatism of the Soviet political elite and of the inertia built into the foundations of the mono-organizational socialism.”

The features that characterized the Stalinist system of Public Administration continued to be in vogue in spite of efforts by successive leaders to undo the same. The monopoly of the Communist Party and the fact that Public Administration was closely intertwined with the party helped the administrative structure maintain its status quo. It was strongly set in its ways as was observed in its response to Gorbachev’s reforms that sought to change the administrative structure. The large apparatus that Public Administration had built up enabled it to wield power and influence over every sector of the Soviet society. Centralized command system also characterized the Soviet administration. However, large numbers and centralized system

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together had only delayed reforms and made everything cumbersome. It also deprived initiative at the lower levels.

Thus Soviet administrative structure in March 1985 was not something which was ideally suited to be the instrument for Gorbachev to implement his reforms. The situation warranted the reform of Public Administration before the reform of the Soviet Union. In fact, the first initiative seemed to be an administrative measure in the launch of the anti-alcohol campaign in May 1985 with a view of bringing discipline in the work places and improving work performance.\textsuperscript{104}

The Soviet period for Public Administration meant constant changes and increasing numbers. The bureaucrats wielded much power in their hands in terms of policy implementation which they manipulated in ways that would safeguard their position. They functioned within the gambit of self-fulfilment and self-aggrandizement. This was built up within the system over a period of time which soon became its characteristic feature. The enormity of tasks and challenges, ahead of Gorbachev in reforming the Soviet Public Administration for his programmes was thus mind-boggling.

Indeed the reforms that Gorbachev introduced, on becoming the General Secretary, can be seen as a response to the prevailing political, economic, social and administrative situation in the Soviet Union, of which the state of Public Administration was an integral aspect.

We now take up our main theme, namely the impact of the process of perestroika on Soviet Public Administration in a systematic manner.