People say: control is necessary...But who should do this? If we are to count on controllers, then we will have to increase that apparatus still further. We have to do it through democracy, through the people participating in everything.

(M.S. Gorbachev, 29 July 1987)

THE 'GREAT DECADE' (1953-1964)

On the morning of 6 March 1953 it was announced:

"The heart of Lenin's comrade-in-arm and the inspired continuer of his work, the heart of the wise leader and teacher of the Communist Party and the Soviet people, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, has ceased to beat". Despite these high sounding words it was immediately apparent that the death of Stalin was the first and essential act of liberalization of the dictatorial system. The system lost two salient features - first, the personal autocratic leadership of Stalin and second, the cult of his person. Not a single Soviet leader published a commemorative article.

On 16 April 1953 'collective leadership' was proclaimed as one of the fundamental principles of the
Party. Thus the change in the Party life began. The title of General Secretary was replaced by that of the First Secretary of the C.C. Nikita Khrushchev became the First Secretary in September 1953. The Politbureau was replaced by a Presidium. The most important was the curtailment of the power of the secret police and abolition of the notorious 'special Courts'. Once the secret police had been subdued, the party apparatus's power automatically became unparallel. The apparatus was not curbed. In fact, Khrushchev heavily relied on the Party apparatus to implement his reforms both inside the Party as well as in the economy. The new collective leadership was not to change the system in its essence. It became clear after the condemnation of Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress. Khrushchev's "Secret Report" to the delegates was limited exclusively to criticise Stalin's person. Citing numerous data and examples of Stalin's 'despotic character', his 'mania for greatness' and 'crude abuse of power' Khrushchev successfully begged the question: how it was possible to build such a system. Not only that the Report did not deal with the problems of organisational mechanism which rendered help (or remained helpless) in

making such a dictatorial system but also it was kept from the Soviet people. As Khrushchev said, "we should know the limits; we should not give ammunition to the enemy; we should not wash our dirty linen before their eyes". As if the crimes of the Stalin era were a private affair of the party! Like Dostoyevsky's Peter Verkhovensky (The Possessed) Stalin had so involved his accomplices in his crimes that no party leader of stature was without guilt. This explains why no judicial process was initiated for all those crimes Khrushchev enumerated.

This said, it must be noted that delivering at all the Secret Report and bringing those crimes for discussion was an act of remarkable courage. For one thing, Khrushchev did put his power and even life on the line in doing so as all other powerful leaders (Molotov, Voroshilov, Malenkov and Kaganovich) were against it. For another, opening such a debate could not have failed to question the


axiom of Party's infallibility. If the Party remained united and able to exercise its power under the collective leadership it was mainly due to new enthusiasm of the party apparatus. The *apparatchiki*, mostly younger men as the result of the purge and the Second World War, were really happy with their newly found personal security. Everything else they already had and Khrushchev did not touch the power and privileges of the apparatus.

However, Khrushchev wanted to revive the Communist Party on some institutional, principled bases. Even at the 19th Party Congress he had expressed his intent. 5 During the last two decades the party organisations were greatly emasculated. Still its network was formally maintained all over the country through which one could reach out to every place in order to carry out his reform. Khrushchev understood it very well and decided not to disturb the party apparatus immediately. As he saw his mission first "in providing peace and wellbeing for the Soviet people" the reform of the party was postponed. 7


7. In part this postponement was also due to relatively unsecured leadership of Khrushchev at the beginning. Thus without being in a confident position reforming the Party would have been risking in his own job.
Indeed, in 1959 a noted western scholar was writing, "Life in the Soviet Union has been transformed, has been improved almost out of recognition in the past five years. This improvement has been due more to Khrushchev than to any other individual; and it had been achieved with surprisingly few tears". He also noted that "at the moment of writing" Khrushchev was engaged in transforming "the whole aspect of the Party...by introducing into high Party offices all over the country men who have proved themselves in industry, engineering, science, agriculture, etc." The test time came in October 1961 when at the 22nd Party Congress Khrushchev proposed the new Party Rules. The organisational changes in the draft Rules were of cardinal importance as it hit the vital interests of the apparatchiki:

It is contemplated that at all regular elections of the C.P.S.U. Central Committee and its Presidium, not less than one-fourth of their membership shall be newly elected; in the case of the Central Committees of the Union-republic Communist Parties and of territory and province Party Committees, not less than one-third; and in the case of region, city and district Party Committees and the committees and bureaus of primary Party organisations, one-half.

It was also proposed that the members of the Presidium of the C.C. of the C.P.S.U., members of the C.C. of the Union-republic Communist Parties and of territory, region, city and district-Party Committees would not be elected for more than two terms.

These proposals were too far from the situation which the founders of scientific socialism envisaged for the officials of the workers' state. According to it their position was thought to be 'at any time revocable and bound by the formal instructions of his constituents'. Endorsing it in the State and Revolution Lenin said that the rule must be implemented forthwith once the working class comes into power. In comparison to such Marxist, Leninist stipulations Khrushchev's proposals offered the Party officials four to eight years to stay in the office without a break. But what happened at the Congress was an unwitting approval of Roberto Michels and Max Weber rather than of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin:

[The draft Rules] aroused stormy protests among younger leaders. They felt that the representatives of the older generation, who 'had sat in their offices far too long' were trying to limit their opportunities. They considered it utterly unfair. In the next draft the number of terms was increased to three, but even that was rejected. In the final text the whole idea of creating a new procedure for the replacement of cadres had been hacked up beyond recognition.10

10. Burlatsky, n. 6, p.54.
Not that Khrushchev was against the officialdom or oligarchy. Far from it, in his regime too very soon plenary sessions of the CC began to assume a purely formal character. Roy Medvedev has testified that even the members of Presidium often received the relevant documents of important proposals a few hours or as little as thirty or forty minutes before the actual meeting.11 The real work was done and crucial decisions taken behind the scenes among a narrow circle of advisers in the apparat. Proposals were hammered out and adopted by a kind of caucus consisting of trusted officials and even Khrushchev's relatives.12 As a matter of fact, most of the innovations were based on bureaucratic and centralized structures. The Committee of Party and State Control of the CC to the CPSU, for instance, was set up in 1962 with extensive powers of control and was highly centralized.13 Khrushchev created many separate departments within the central Secretariat already in 1955. In 1956 a special Bureau of the CC for the Russian Federation was created under which those separate departments of the Secretariat were grouped.

12. Ibid.
For different branches of industries numerous specialized departments were initiated. All this only proliferated the already gigantic Party apparatus. In fact, the structure of the apparatus became so complex that special diagrams had to be displayed in party educational centres to try and make it comprehensible.

Nevertheless, Khrushchev honestly wanted to create some guarantees against the excessive concentration of power in the hands of one person, against leaders staying in power too long, against cadres at all levels from the primary party organisations to the upper echelon retaining their posts when they have become too old. That is why he split the regional party committees into two - one for industry and one for agriculture. Thus to reduce the overwhelming power which one party boss had accumulated in a region. But, in his endeavour Khrushchev laid his hands on a sacred cow. As Dostoyevsky earlier wrote:

The machine is more important than goodness. The governmental administrative machine - this is all we have left. It cannot be changed, there is no way to replace it without cracking the foundation. It is better to make ourselves

14. The arrangement continued after Khrushchev. While visiting to few regional and city Party Committees in 1985-86 the author noticed such diagrams displayed in the committee rooms to explain the complex structure of the whole party organisation.
better, the functionaries say.... The bird in the hand and the two in the bush.

*(Diary of a Writer, 1881)*

Khrushchev's reforms, even in an attenuated form, in the party organisation caused him the loss of majority support not only in the Presidium of the CC but also in the CC, particularly among the secretaries of the oblast committees, who represented a majority of the CC Plenum.¹⁵ Western scholars have largely ignored the significance of the organisational reforms in the fall of Khrushchev, who was at the height of his prestige, tenacity and power. They attributed his fall primarily to his failure in agricultural reforms, his arbitrariness and to his boorishness. But Russia can endure any experiment, can combine most incongruous contradictions. Besides, the Stalinist methods were not given up altogether although the powers of the secret police was curbed. In essence the basic rules of the game were the same and the censorship, prisons and the fear of security agents were still real.¹⁶ In June 1957, the 'collectivity' of the leadership was

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¹⁶. For an account of internal Party life as well as the general socio-political conditions in the Khrushchev era, see Vladimir Bukovsky's famous memoir *To Build a Castle: My Life as a Dissenter* (London, 1978), passim.
already ended with the removal of 'anti-Party group'. Malenkov, Kalinin, Molotov, Shepilov, Bulganin, Pervukhin, Saburov and afterwards Marshal Zhukov too were dismissed.17

That is to emphasise that Khrushchev was firmly in command of the whole system of the party-state when at the 22nd Congress he got through his idea of limited tenure, albeit in a much diluted form. Soon his support was gone and an undercurrent of tension arose between Khrushchev and the CC members. These frictions, as Medvedevs have put it, had to be resolved before the question of compulsory replacements of one-third CC members at the next Party Congress in 1965 came to threaten the members' privileges.18 The Comrades realised that there was no time to lose.

17. Ponomaryov, n. 5, pp. 680-3. Ota Sîk writes that the "collective leadership" in a communist system is only a purely formalistic measure. As long as people are not able to elect, control, criticize, and dismiss their leaders, collectivity means nothing but priority of this group's interests over those of the people. In addition, within the group there will always be covert power struggles, imbalances, and fluctuations eventually resulting in the supremacy of one leader over the others. See Ota Sîk, The Communist Power System (New York, 1981), p. 52.

On 14 October 1964, in a neat operation, following full constitutional party procedure, Nikita Khrushchev was relieved of his duties as the First Secretary. The proposal to drop him from membership in the Central Committee was accepted unanimously and without debate.  

And L.I. Brezhnev was elected the new First Secretary.

THE ERA OF STABILITY, AND STAGNATION (1964-1982)

Call of the Apparatus

After Khrushchev's fall the top Party officials were unwilling to have a strong leader. They wanted to lead quite lives and more confidence in their future. The more important members of the CC were resentful of strong leaders of A. Shelepin type, who was the key man in ousting Khrushchev.  

19. Ibid., pp. 172-5. According to Ota Šík "there is a dialectical relation between the power of the key functionaries and the power of the bureaucratic party apparatus, with the first enjoying relatively greater independence - according to the degree of their propagandistically exaggerated popularity - but the second exercising real power in the long run". This aptly explains the Khrushchev's downfall. Šík, n.17, p. 52. Emphasis in original.

20. Ibid., p.172. Brezhnev was not an active participant in the power struggle. He was quite satisfied with the "third man" role in the leadership. The chief protagonists chose him as a temporary solution since at the moment they were at variance on many issues.
They wanted to have a weaker and more benevolent leader. This thirst for stability, pervading throughout the party apparatus, dovetailed with Brezhnev's 'stability' slogan. That was a major reason when Brezhnev travelled around the Soviet Union he was welcomed by the Party functionaries much more than Khrushchev was. A visit by Khrushchev used to be regarded as a strict inspection. Brezhnev's visits, on the other hand were seen as a kind of demonstration showing his unity with the local Party and state bureaucrats. Confident of the backing of the apparatus bureaucrats, Brezhnev slowly but surely rid the Politbureau of men with political ambitions - Alexander Shchelopin Gennadi Voronov, Kirill Mazurov, Pyotr Shelest and Dmitri Polyansky.

Thus the temporary leader became the permanent, in fact as permanent as possible.

A truly collective leadership emerged under Brezhnev which was also more conservative in thought and deeds. Almost all of Khrushchev's innovations were reversed. Especially, the most hated innovation in Party Rules requiring mandatory replacement of one-third CC and oblast committee

members at every election was quickly rescinded. The term limit for holding office successively was also abolished. In fact, this was the only major change in the Party Rules (abolition of the Art. 25 of the 1961 Rules) at the Twenty-third Party Congress. Thus the bone of contention for the Party officialdom was done away with and the apparatchiki were satisfied with their positions as sinecures for life.

As a result conservation grew and consolidated. Khrushchev's name vanished from the press, while references to Stalin began to reappear in favourable context. The KGB again acquired considerable muscle which was drained of much of its strength under Khrushchev. The Party and state apparatus was also strengthened as the new leadership could not rely on its popularity. As a corollary the political presence of the Army also made itself felt. Thus every conservative and authoritarian trend appeared to gain strength.

However, one liberal change initiated by Khrushchev


23. The 'State Security Committee', a re-organisation of the former NKVD.
continued as Brezhnev said "we should not pour muck on ourselves". Accordingly Khrushchev was not ill-treated in the press or punished in any way. More or less this became the new rule of the game whenever a top leader was removed. In other levels too the officials were quietly demoted, restricted or put down. Daring innovators and those falled from favour were not shot or imprisoned as has been the usual treatment in the thirties.

Brezhnev himself was a typical apparatus official and had never shown any distinction in his political-organisational career. Neither he liked now to take on too much work. He entrusted his subordinates even those affairs that only the head of the Party and the state could effectively manage. Hence, under Brezhnev, each of the secretaries of regional party committees as well as ministers of the state was more independent in his actions. It gave them not only personal stability but also more power at their respective institutions. Although this was certainly a 'liberalization' in the party organisation but it must not be taken also as a 'democratisation'. There had been very little that was significant of the latter process. After reverting the Khrushchev's innovations the party organisation came closer to the Stalinism regime, differing basically

in the matter of insecurity and personal risk. Other rules, written as well as unwritten, remained the same. As in the Party so it was in the society as a whole. Instead of the horrors of the Stalin era, a moderate fear was maintained.

Organisational Life Conditioned

By the time Brezhnev's regime stabilized, for the party organisation it was already more than four decades of many well-established procedures and customs. Apparatus appointments, instructions from above, secrecy, manners of conferences and Congresses etc. were now a matter of habit for the entire Party. More so, because Brezhnev while rescinding Khrushchev's reforms did not intend to introduce something new as his slogan was 'stability' in the party. Therefore, the existence or non-existence of the inner-party democracy-in whatever way a party member interpreted it - was taken for granted. From the viewpoint of organisational psychology it was natural. The whole generation of party members, both apparatchiki and ordinary members, knew no other methods than what were used. The whole organisational life in all its ramifications, was already conditioned. 25

25. The perfect conditioning of the party organisation can be illustrated by the fact that despite the 'liberal' regime the issue of ideological factions within the party was not ever raised by anyone. Everybody could read in Lenin's books that the ban on such factions was 'temporary' and yet the issue was not raised in this most peaceful, stable prosperous period in the Party's life.
The insulation from 'bourgeois' ideas and literature (i.e., Western newspapers, books etc.) also greatly contributed to the conditioning of the party as well as the society as a whole. As a leading Soviet political scientist later commented that the command and centralized methods had seemingly alleviated life not only for those who ruled but also for those who were ruled. It was so much easier to relax and wait till the order arrives than to think independently, justifying one's own actions and making responsible decisions individually or collectively. The organisation under Brezhnev came under the spell of the saying "the bosses know better". However, at the same time the negative effects of this phenomenon could not have been avoided. That the organisation began to rust was evident from the fact that during the entire period of Brezhnev there was never any discussion on the party's internal dynamics. The Party could not get any societal feedback either, in the form of creative suggestion or criticism, because of the Party's dictatorship over the society and the non-existence of the freedom of speech. In an indirect way this caused the Party an irreparable loss.

Selections, Elections and the Nomenklatura

Gryadushchemu Veku\textsuperscript{27} is a Soviet novel published in 1970. It was written by a Russian author Georgi Markov who was not a dissident but a member of the CC of the CPSU.\textsuperscript{28}

The story went like this: The First Secretary of the Territorial Party Committee dies. Who is going to succeed him? The second in command and other local important bosses don't dare ask the man who really calls the shots - the inspector of the CPSU Central Committee, let alone decide the issue themselves. Meanwhile, in the faraway Italy, the head of the Soviet trade mission is inexplicably recalled to Moscow. The person happened to be the native of the territory that has just lost its First Secretary. He returns and reports at the Party headquarters in Moscow, whereupon he is told he is to be the new First Party Secretary in the territory. Accompanied by the said inspector, he arrives in his native place. The local Party bureau 'recommends' him straightaway as a candidate to be elected by the plenary meeting of the Territorial Party Committee...

The marvel of this novel was that the author did not have any doubt that the whole system was it should be!

\textsuperscript{27} 'For the Coming Century'.

\textsuperscript{28} L. Radzikhovsky, "The 'inner-party'" in The Party: On the Road to Renewal (Moscow, 1990), pp. 21-22.
Neither its publication created any ripples that could have unfavourable effect on the author. It was 1970. The whole event well reflected the conditioning of the Party's life and its accepted organisational norms, however far they were from the bookish principles of socialist democracy.

The elective principle in the Party organisation, therefore, remained an empty ritual in the Brezhnev period as well.29 The apparatus acted in the spirit of pure bureaucratic centralism. From the district level upward elections were an undemocratic formality in which not even the merits of candidates were discussed. In a district party conference, held once in two years, one of the delegates to the conference read out a long list of candidates prepared in advance by the apparatus of the next higher party body. After this another delegate read out a further list of candidates to make up a delegation to the city party conference (the next higher body). Both list contained around 100-150 names varying upon the importance of the districts' location. The list always contained as many names as the number of seats.30

29. Only at the lowest level of the Party, i.e., in the primary party organisations (PPOs) the election was a real affair in many instances. Medvedev, n.11, pp. 109-10.
30. This practice was introduced by Stalin in 1934 at the 17th Congress. Incidentally, he received the least number of votes among all the elected CC members and was elected only because the list included as many names as the number of seats. R. Medvedev, "Coming from the River Fact", in A. Proskurin, comp., The Stalin Phenomenon (New Delhi, 1989), p. 42.
It precluded any possibility of rejection of even a single nominee. Characteristically, the overwhelming majority of the candidates were completely unknown to the common delegates at these conferences. Neither testimonials were considered necessary to be read out as to support the suitability of the candidates. Thus there was no discussion of their qualifications etc. After the reading of the lists the secret ballot took place. Each delegate received printed lists of candidates for the district committee and the city conference and, after a cursory glance dropped them into the ballot box. From talks with the participants at such conferences, Roy Medvedev has established that during 1965-1976 in Moscow there had never been a single case of someone proposing a candidate additional to those on the lists prepared in advance or of any names being struck off them. If this was in Moscow, then the situation of other places would hardly have been much different.

City and regional party committees were also elected in a similar way at the city and regional party conferences. Same formalities applied to delegates elected

31. The Soviet scholar G. Shakhzazarov provided a new argument in favour of this old practice: "the working class sought to ensure the class purity of representative bodies". See, his *The Destiny of the World: The Socialist Shape of Things to Come* (Moscow, 1979), p. 142.

to the party congress. Again there was not a single case known where a candidate nominated by the apparat of the regional committee as a candidate for the CC or a delegate to the congress was not elected. On the other hand, just to complete the picture of selections and elections, the expulsions from the Party by the district or the city committee were frequently enacted without reference to the primary organisation. In the Party Rules, however, the clause stipulating a contrary procedure remained as a decoration. Such clauses of the Party Rules were primarily for the scholarly purposes through which the Soviet authors used to 'prove', petitio principii, the inner-party democracy as well as the existence of democratic centralism.

The organisational practice of the Soviet Communist Party cannot be fully understood without taking into account the phenomenon of Nomenklatura, an exclusively Soviet innovation introduced during the Stalin era. It was the

33. Ibid., p. 111.
34. List of names (of posts). As to the origin of this phenomenon, A. Sakharov said, "it may be affirmed that as early as the 1920's and 30's - and definitively in the postwar years - a special Party-bureaucratic stratum was formed and could be discerned. This is the nomenklatura, as its members called themselves..." in My Country and the World (New York, 1976), p.25. For an authentic study see M. Volsensky Nomenklatura: Anatomy of the Soviet Ruling Class, Eric Moesbachar, trans (London, 1984); and Vyacheslav Kostikov, Nomenklatura: Its Lustre and Worthlessness (Moscow, 1989).
exclusive list of highly placed party and government positions that had to be filled by appointment, from above. By extension the holders of such positions were also called Nomenklatura. From the CC of the CPSU to the district party committees, they all had exclusive lists of Nomenklatura posts belonging to their areas. 35 In popular perception the Nomenklatura was perceived as the chief beneficiaries and controllers of the whole system. That is why someone could boast of informing a relative that "our Ivan Ivanovich has joined the nomenklatura" or "this is a nomenklatura post" etc.

Although the Soviet people knew its existence as well as its importance, yet in political literature, books, 

35. According to an official explanation the "nomenklatura of cadres" (Nomenklatura kadrov) is:

"A list of posts which act by the decision or consent of one or other party Committee. Such list is forwarded by the party committees themselves with due regard for concrete problem and work condition of the party organisation. The nomenklature of cadres usually includes posts of most important works, of responsible positions in the party, state, economy, society and other works....The Central Committee of the CPSU, CC of the Communist Party of a Union Republic, territory committee, region committee, Okrug committee, city committee and district committee have all their own nomenklature of posts. In the primary party organisation its necessity generally does not arise. There are two kinds of nomenclature of cadres: fundamental and account-control. In the first case comes those posts which act and discharge the responsibilities by the decision of a party committee, and in the second with its consent...."

newspapers and magazines, academic publications no one could find this mysterious word! Never an official pronouncement was made of this most significant category in the Soviet administrative hierarchy. It was characteristic of the Soviet practice that although the appointments, transfers, promotions, removals etc. were the most significant part of the Party apparatus's work a perfect secrecy was maintained about all this. Not only the Soviet public at large but also the party men of a committee did not know the actual decision-making if they are not involved in it directly. 36

That is why the Nomenklatura wore an invisible cap and travelled incognito. Persons belonging to this super elite existed, even special neighbourhoods for them existed in many Soviet capitals. But the entire Soviet system and especially the Party feigned that the phenomenon did not exist. What was the reason?

First of all, nomenklatura appointments were against the formal law. No Soviet law said anything about cabinet ministers, military district commanders or chairman of regional executive committees of the Soviets having been 'discussed' and approved in advance by some Party Committee.

Similarly any such provision was not mentioned in the charters of, say, the Academy of Sciences or the Writers' Union. That the editor-in-chief of a magazine or the Rector of an institute will be appointed in such a manner was not written in any official state or party document.

Secondly, the exclusiveness of the Nomenklatura. A nomenklatura official was not necessarily have to be a Party member. A member of this administrative caste was more than that. It was the 'inner-party' in the Orwellian sense. Joining it was usually for life. However, there was no way knowing how many posts or which posts were in this category. Finally, it was the lavish perks and privileges attached to such positions which gave the Nomenklatura its mystic and awe.

Since both the Party and the state were supposedly functioning under the principle of universal electivity, the first point of democratic centralism, there was no way acknowledging such a great breach of the principle. Hence the incognito travel by the nomenklatura officials. Commenting upon this unique phenomenon a Russian scholar had written that "for many a decade political life in the USSR had been a


38. According to the Fundamental Law of the USSR, adopted on 7 October 1977, the whole Soviet state system functioned according to the principle of democratic centralism. (Art. 3)
kind of euphemism". 39

Reign of Logocracy

'Equipped with the Marxist-Leninist ideology' the Soviet Communist Party had defined not only the general prospect for the development of society but its own organisational code as well. Ever since 1921 when a 'temporary' ban over differing (from the official) interpretations of the ideology was imposed, it has been constant belief of the leadership that if the Party did not speak in one voice on every single point then the organisational cohesion of the Party would be in danger. Therefore, the first code in the organisation was to take every document coming from the top as an authoritative elaboration of or contribution to the 'Marxism-Leninism'. In the sixties and seventies it reflected in a typical manner - every political, academic writing and analysis from the Soviet establishments used to eulogize, as a rule, the latest Party document out of any proportion. If a book or article was published in late seventies, for instance, then the General Secretary's speech at the 25th Congress was the great source of theoretical

understanding. If a piece of academic writing was taken from the early eighties then every theoretical and practical issue appears to be illuminated by the documents of the 26th Congress (as well as by the General Secretary's latest Report in a CC Plenum etc.). Recently a Soviet scholar has explained it as a monopoly on the Word, Logocracy, to ensure domination over the Party and consecutively over the society as a whole. 40 Accordingly, only the leader or higher party body could perfectly decide what did and what did not correspond to the official ideology. In practice it took the form of extensive instructions to the lower party bodies for all sundry purposes. These instructions, issued by the higher party apparatus in a chain system constituted the decisive reference point for the functioning of the party organisation. The instructions were both normative and prohibitive in nature. For example, one such instruction said that the stamp 'secret' was to be put on the documents which reveal methods of the work of the Party committees. 41


41. Onikov, n.36, pp. 88-89. Now it can easily be understood why in the maze of Soviet publications on the CPSU not a single article could be found which narrated an actual party meeting. At best only party resolutions and their significance were usually dealt upon in academic and journalistic writings.
Another instruction prohibited to speak on telephone or to make notes in writing-pads to use "in the open press and public speeches". Even those documents which did not contain any secret Party and state information could be stamped as 'secret'. How perfectly this secrecy resembles with what Karl Marx had called "The general spirit of the bureaucracy" which was "the, secret, the mystery, preserved within itself by the hierarchy and against the outside world by being a close corporation".

Therefore, the Party organisation was reduced, for all practical purposes, to a common bureaucratic organisation which issued instructions to the lower bodies and followed those coming from above. In such a circumstances the party personnel were chosen but according to the degree, so far as the necessary qualification was concerned, they mastered the word - the ideas, commands and resolutions. This was a great qualification of ability. That is why when the denouncement of the Brezhnev period began under Gorbachev the period was named as the period of 'administrative-command system'.

42. Ibid.

Under such a bureaucratic system the competence and creativity of the party personnel perished, although the logocratic cohesion (in cooperation with other factors) generated an illusion of omnipotence of the Party. The majority of Party men continued to believe that the Party was "the only master of the minds and thoughts, the spokesman, leader and organiser of the people". However, in the kingdom of parrots all party pronouncements seemed real to the majority by the sheer repetition of it as well as by a vague feeling that those above knew the best. The theoretical and sociological concepts as the 'new Soviet man', 'the State of the whole people', 'developed socialism' etc. were never tested or evaluated in a rigorous manner. They were just proclaimed from above. Their repetition for years through all possible medium of propaganda in fact created on ostrich-like complacency among the apparatchiki and scholars alike. All issues of theory and practice of socialism were nicely settled in catechism.

45. To the question what was the political-theoretical rationale behind the military intervention in Afghanistan, a Soviet scholar replied, to the author, that since the top leaders had more knowledge, information, wisdom and experience so the action must had been correct. (It was in 1985)
46. A. Butenko, Theory and Practice of Real Socialism (Moscow, 1983), passim.
The Party apparently remained in a sound position in the entire pre-Gorbachev period. With a membership of around 20 million it was ruling the largest country in the world. There was no opposition in the state and the Party's monopoly was not only constitutionally guaranteed but also the Soviet people accepted it as a well-established reality. Within the Party Organisation, the central apparatus ran the affairs as smoothly as possible. Yet there was 'something rotten in the kingdom of Denmark'.

The Party was losing its internal strength on its own accord - like an organism. It was like Napoleon's victorious army in possession of Moscow with all her wealth and without any resistance. But, as that magnificent army began to lose its vigour once captured the promised land so the Soviet Communist Party was debilitating with unlimited power in hand and no resistance. For the most part the internal weakening was a gradual and silent process. However, it was reflected in various social and organisational phenomena.

(a) **Ideological Weakening**

Despite all out propagation the ideology was loosing as a motive for action as well as a cohesive force
for the organisation. More and more partymembers realized the growing contradictions between ideological theories and the reality. Any conscientious partymember could easily perceive the contrast between the systematic, lavish privileges for the Party hierarchies on the one hand and the 'confident movement towards communism' on the other. Similar was the case between the Party's claim of having realised Lenin's *State and Revolution* in the Soviet Union and the existing gigantic party and state bureaucracy. Besides, the expected superiority of the productive forces of socialism over that of the capitalism was nowhere to be seen. With the relative opening up of the Soviet society and the subsequent interaction with the outside world it was increasingly clear that in the technological race the Soviet Union was hardly able in keeping up with the West. In the event, making Marxism-Leninism an obligatory subject in all Soviet educational institutions as also the extensive network of Party schools could not stop the erosion of the official ideology. As a matter of fact the party members and officials were more sceptive than the non-party people.47

47. During 1985-86 the author had the opportunity to talk with Soviet people on ideological and social issues. Many non-Party people, although they did not have a high opinion of the Party, defended the Soviet achievements in comparison to the West. The Party members, in informal discussions, were doubtful about the superiority of Soviet socialism. Some of them were sceptical about many fundamental notions of Marxism itself such as the labour theory of value, economic conditions as the decisive factor in social development, inevitable demise of capitalism etc.
(b) Mediocrity of the Party Personnels

In 1970s and early 1980s when being a party member did not involve any risk and tough responsibilities but, on the contrary, was the avenue to get perks and privileges the criteria for personnel selection became good personal or family contacts, loyalty to the right people, one's ethnic origin or even a matter of chance. As a result not only at the lower and middle levels but also at the higher levels of leadership it was rare to come across men of outstanding talent, impressive personality or having the ability to make a good speech in public.

As for the top rung of leadership they were for the most part only average and in a number of cases even less than that. Many foreign leaders surpassed their counterparts in the Soviet Union. According to Medvedev it was one reason why the socialist camp had been defensive in 1970s in many areas of ideological and political competition. The majority of Soviet leaders were past the age of retirement. By a

48. Medvedev, n.11, pp. 113-4. Medvedev has also noted that (in mid '70s) the post of CC Secretary for Ideology was held by an expert of chemical industry while the CC. Sec. for International Affairs was a specialist in the automobile designs.

49. Ibid., p. 114 ff.
calculation the average age of the CC members was sixty-one. That is, most of them, trained in the Stalinist ideology and tradition, were not really capable to cope with new theoretical and practical problems.

Leonid Brezhnev, the General Secretary of the Party for long eighteen years was also a symbol of the Party in many a respects. His speeches were graphic proof of the degeneration of oratory arts among the Soviet leaders (as also of those highly placed officials who used to write the speeches). Brezhnev had a great difficulty even in reading his speeches and used to make a lot of mistakes in pronunciation. He grew confused at public appearances and before TV cameras. As Medvedev has testified, Brezhnev was unable to make even a brief congratulatory speech when he presented awards to his Politbureau colleagues. 50 The common people treated Brezhnev with indifference, evolving, in the last years of his life, into a poorly concealed scorn. Despite fifteen years of overbearing efforts the Soviet propaganda failed to build up an image of Brezhnev as a theorist or a politician.

50. Medvedev, n.21, pp. 15-16.
At lower levels the condition was no better. When Gorbachev's 'new thinking' and new practices began to unfold, the real conditions of the organisation quickly exposed itself. In meetings and assemblies the communists - the supposedly leading and driving force - were able to offer "only flabby, feeble and lacking arguments". Comparing with their forerunners in the 1920s, it was plain that the organisation was of old age and on the path of decay. The high profile academicians fared not much better. Confronted with a new situation when old cliché and formulae were no longer required and an applause was no longer assured beforehand, they tried to find suitable dogmas or quotations from the very old Marxist classics to suit new Party documents. They proved themselves completely unable to think anew over the whole gamut of socio-political problems,

51. Onikov, n. 36, pp. 81-82.

52. "What makes an organisation grow old is habit based upon success; when new circumstances arise, the habit is too strong to be shaken off" Bertrand Russell, Power: A New Social Analysis (London, 1975), p. 120.

53. See, for instance, The USSR: Acceleration of Socio-Economic Development (1987) published by the USSR Academy of Sciences. It contains articles by a galaxy of Academicians and heads of various high profile institutes. Mostly written in 1986 when not perestroika but uskorenie (acceleration) was the catchword. Hardly any article dealt with the cardinal issues which really hampered the socio-economic development of the country.
although now they had the freedom to think and write different from the traditional strait-jacket. In the end the whole Party was comparable to Dostoyevsky's intellectual pauper:

Something without land under it, without soil or root, just being blown along. One can say: blessed are the poor in spirit, but it is impossible to say blessed are the proletarianized in spirit...He is an impeccably gloved young man, etc., who gulped down a few stylish ouvrages...some argent, but whose mind wonders in eternal ténèbres, yet for all that, terrible impertinence. That is all the good we'll get from them. All of them, of course, are preparing (hope to) to rule the state.

(Diary of a Writer, 1877)

(c) Oblomovism

In the last two decades of its existence the Soviet Party organisation reached to such a state which, in part, can be described with the help of a native Russian category named Oblomovshchina oroblomovism. It was derived from the immortal character of the I.A. Goncharov's novel Oblomov (1859) written in mid-nineteenth century. No serious author or artist in Russia could ever brush aside this national type which always existed in Russia. The generic features of this character were: inertness caused by its mental and moral development, wilting internal strength,

54. For a classic analysis of this Russian phenomenon see N. Dobrolyubov, "What is Oblomovism?" in Dobrolyubov, Selected Philosophical Essays (Moscow, 1956), pp. 174-217.
losing ability to make means conform with aims, repugnance for serious and independent activity and finally, a tendency to escape from reality into a make-believe. These features of Oblomov were moulded by both internal and external positions. Always served by a Zakhar, and another three hundred Zakhars (personal servant and serfs) Oblomov was a gentleman.

In a rough, but useful parallel the Soviet Communist Party reached the same state. It was utter inertness which the organisation showed during the trying times of 1985-91. The Party proved itself unable to assert itself although it had all material means, a huge membership and no organised opposition to openly defy its traditional right to rule. (Till the very end, the oppositionists, at the best, demanded to end the monopoly of the Party and never to disband it.) It was a sign of its lost moral and mental capabilities caused by years' complacent existence. Nikolai Ryzhkov, the then Chairman of the Council of Ministers, conceded the fact

55. In an opinion poll at the Kuibyshev region Party organisation, conducted by some sociologists in April 1989, about 52% respondents said that the raikom's inefficiency was due to the Communists' passivity while 28% attributed it to raikom's bureaucratic approach. Both evaluations, in a sense, suggest the same thing. V. Amelin, "Crisis in the Party" in 'Social Sciences Today' Editorial Board, The Party and Perestroika (Moscow, 1990), pp. 150-1.
in so many words:

Developments show that, although we have actually lost our influence and authority as well as the possibility of exercising influence on societal processes, it is still pretended, consciously or not, that nothing has happened and we still hold the main levers and can as before keep in hand the complex developments in our country.

Now it is also clear, in retrospect, that the leadership of the Party had not the capability to make means conform with aims. A careful perusal of the decrees, decisions, speeches, conclusions, reports and institutional changes inacted during the Gorbachev period graphically shows that the Party leadership was unable to think of devices to produce even a single desired result. For six years it was words, words and words: full of sound and fury, signifying nothing! The entire period of noisy restructuring brought nothing but repeated reshuffling of the CC and creations of numerous 'committees', 'councils', 'special bodies' etc. But in the net result the leadership which started from giving socialism a human face, after so many 'landmark achievements' was only able to wind up the Party and the Soviet Union. The Gorbachev episode revealed at least one thing that the Party leaders did not know the way out from the mess created in the country.

The Party reached to such a state by its own deeds. It barred itself as well as the entire society from the 'reactionary' western studies in social sciences. This self-imposed censorship ostracised the Party from much valuable informations, ideas and analyses produced in the outside world. Rejecting them wholesome the Party at large became unable to compare and determine the Soviet problems on a realistic basis. It seriously impaired the Party's capacity to find means conforming with the ends. To see the frontiers of the Party leaders' knowledge an example would be in order which relates to the begetter of the 'new political thinking', Mikhail Gorbachev himself. In the Politbureau Gorbachev was considered an agriculture specialist. His first sustained exposure to the West was his official trip to Canada in 1983. There, while pottering around farms, at one large wheat farm Gorbachev questioned the owner of the farm on how many people he employed on an acreage. "Just me and the wife and a hired man from town" the owner replied. Gorbachev insisted that he did not want to know

57. In general, the Western newspapers, journals, books etc. which were related to the issues of social and political affairs were not available to the Soviet public. Even in the academic institutions, party schools and libraries the situation was not different. Only in selective, highly placed institutes the western materials were available, but could be consulted only after special permission and that too not by everyone.
how many people lived on the farm but how many worked it. "Just me and the wife and a hired hand from town" the puzzled farmer repeated. In another incidence Gorbachev ordered his entourage to stop in a small Canadian town so that he could verify whether the local stores really contained all the convenience foods and other consumer goods that seemed so plentiful in the western countries. It did. 58 Such was the understanding of the top man in the Party on agriculture, a person whose "thirst for knowledge was authentic". 59 From this incidence the general level of knowledge and training of the Party leadership as well as of the membership can be imagined.

The Party's sliding towards Oblomovism was a result of multitude of factors. Apart from the lack of information and knowledge they had an absolute monopoly of power, absence of real discussion and criticism, comfortable living conditions and up higher lavish privileges and depravity. Finally, the non-stop eulogy by the thousands of

Zakhars - in the press, lower hierarchies and academics alike - which caused the negative result. Little wonder if leaders began to live in a world of illusions which they had, in part, created themselves and which in part had been somehow imposed on them. The party was full of what has been called 'miniature Brezhnevs' - unhurried, dull and unremarkable men, not overconcerned about the matters in hand,

60. Medvedev has narrated an incidence in which Pravda did not know whether or in what form an obituary of an old comrade could be published. In any case, the 'party-mindedness' of the Soviet press was a fact beyond doubt which, in practice, meant the propagation of the leadership's views. Medvedev, n.11, p. 125.

61. For example:
"The 25th CPSU Congress once again convincingly displayed to the entire planet that in the modern world...there is in the international arena no more eminent a political figure and statesman; no more farsighted and wise politician; no more vivid personality for whom people of good will throughout the world harbour such sincere feelings of sympathy and love, gratitude and trust; no other person seen as a more outstanding fighter for peace and universal progress... and as the outstanding organiser and inspirer of this sacred struggle than Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev". This choice speech came from none other than Eduard Shevardnadze, then the First Secretary of Georgian CC of the Party in March 1976. Quoted in L.G. Churchward, Soviet Socialism (New York, 1987), p. 154.

62. Institute of Sociological Studies at the USSR Academy of Sciences had a survey on how effective the resolutions of the Council of Ministers had been. The findings were: not more than one resolution out of ten was actually implemented. F. Burlatsky, "Brezhnev and the End of the Thaw" in Leonid Brezhnev: The Period of Stagnation (Moscow, 1989), p. 42.
but quite good at sharing out the benefits. Whenever a problem emerged, the party leaders (including M. Gorbachev) reacted in one and the same way: who was supposed to deal with it? And they proceeded to set up another ministry, committee or a special body. The legendary Ilya Ilyich Oblomov's wishes assumed a similar form when he used to think: 'how good it would be if this were done'. But he did not know how this could be done. Perhaps it will get done somehow...

(d) Growing Alienation

Stalin's death, his denunciation and again his partial rehabilitation - these momentous events in the Soviet Union initiated a silent process in the society which was against the basics of the Soviet ideology. It remained dormant but could never be reversed. Thinking people, within and outside the Party, could not be reconciled to all that happened in the last decades to the professed ideology. Explanations from the official propaganda were not honest either. The leadership was in doublebind because it condemned Stalinism while wishing to use it too. The restoration of the bureaucratic, conservative and authoritarian regime minus terror with the abolition of the short-lived limited freedom of speech made the new rules of the game clear.
After these incidents the Soviet society could never become the same — in its conviction, ideology and its relation to the Party.

The first indication of the new mood came after the removal of Khrushchev. The big news was greeted with complete indifference by the common populace. Brezhnev was astonished when the head of the KGB informed him that no public response or even a single statement had been reported anywhere in the country. 63 Eighteen years later when Brezhnev died, the people again took the news with quite indifference and there was certainly not anything as 'popular grief'. 64 If one compares it with the moment of Stalin's death this was a sea change. The 1953 had shook the peoples' normal life to its foundations. 65

Among other things, this change in peoples' attitude was due to a deep transformation of peoples' psyche. On the surface, however, everything remained as usual with little difference. All were building communism since everybody was doing his job. But, the ideology of Marxism-Leninism

63. Medvedev and Medvedev, n.15, p.176.
64. Medvedev, n.21, pp.6-7.
65. Bukovsky, n.16, pp. 82-83.
which was once a source of inspiration, hope and strength turned into a dead-letter:

from top to bottom no one believes in Marxist dogma anymore, even they continue to measure their action by it, refer to it and use it as a stick to beat one another with: it is both a proof of loyalty and a meal ticket. 66

And it was very natural to happen. Soviet Union was no longer a country of illiterate muzhiks. People could see, think, compare and could not help noticing the ever growing discrepancy between the word and the deed, between the theory of equality and the practice of incredible privileges, between the claims of 'direct democracy' and the gigantic party apparatus, between the statutory clauses of electivity and the nomenklatura appointments, and so on. Universal propaganda to the contrary as well as manufactured data could not gloss it over. 67 Interestingly, the classics of Marx, Engels and Lenin were regularly published - many of them were obligatory studies - which themselves (The State and Revolution of Lenin, for example) were an indictment upon the apparatus rule and the privileged nomenklatura. An average

66. Ibid., p.62.

67. Industrious books and articles were published to say that the Soviet political system was a combination of direct democracy and a genuine representative democracy, that the popular masses directly participated in exercising the state power. See, for instance, V. Zagladin, Socialism: Its Role in History (Moscow, 1983), pp. 112-3 and passim.
reader of the Soviet society could understand that. The system became discredited and people disappointed by the way it worked through the increasing degeneration and corruption. Thus an apathy, if not outright antipathy, towards the system came into being. "Only one person in my entire life has said that he actually likes to live in a Communist state" wrote Bukovsky in 1978, "because it allows him to earn a good salary by publishing all sorts of demagogic rubbish in the newspapers". 68

The universal apathy did not take long to affect the economic processes. Only then intelligent minds and mindful apparatchiki raised alarm within the Party. When Yuri Andropov took over the charge, his speeches gave the clear hints of concern over the state of the economy. 69 Predictably, everything could have gone as usual if the production process and the economic growth had not started seriously lagging behind. But since the rot was set in, the official circles started to recognise that the Soviet system was not an enviable 'developed socialism' heading towards the cherished goal of communism. Now a new course of action was the first thing to search and the test time for the Party came.

68. Bukovsky, n.16, p.64.
69. Y. Andropov, "Karl Marx's Teaching and Some of the Problems in the Building of Socialism in the USSR" in Karl Marx and Our Time (Moscow, 1983). This was one of the most important speeches of Andropov which took note of the Soviet problems and reflected his strategy to tackle them.
It is said that Andropov was intellectually more sound, much experienced and his grasp of both the strategy and tactics in Soviet politics was far deeper. Perhaps it was so, but unfortunately he died too soon and could not do much except putting new themes on the Party's agenda.

FROM REFORM TO RENOUNCEMENT (1985-1991)

The First Thinking

When Gorbachev assumed the reins of the Party he took his cue from Andropov. His first slogan was Uskorenie, the acceleration of the Soviet economy. The new leader was young, charming, confident and full of optimism. Whence he got his exceptional optimism of the Soviet system's capacity is not clear. His career (education, work, experience and knowledge) had nothing special which makes a prospective visionary. Neither his previous record shows any remarkable achievement. In the usual apparatchik way he also used "the talent of pleasing the right people at the right time" and made a success of it.70 Gorbachev was very much like other Soviet leaders except in having an engaging personality.

70. Almost every biographer of Gorbachev has mentioned it. Dodor and Branson, n.59, pp. 30-31; Z. Medvedev, Gorbachev (Oxford, 1986), p. 72. But, Medvedev mentioned Gorbachev's links with some top leaders as responsible for his future promotion. In the earlier advancement, his personality "did not require special patronage".
and a good command over oratory. These qualities, although rare in the contemporary Soviet leaders, were hardly adequate to accomplish the herculean task of reforming Soviet socialism. But, then, he had a singular quest for change along with his unexceptionable optimism. His inadequate knowledge (if not ignorance) of the best and the worst of the both worlds as also his narrow political experience only made him impatient for his mission. He would not listen to Machiavelli: "It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things". 71

And yet Gorbachev had not a 'new order of things' in his mind either. One is amazed to see that while embarking upon a new course he did not find it necessary to offer a well thought-through programme, even a rough blueprint of what exactly he was going to change or to introduce in the system. He appeared to be a true Leninist in this sense: "On s'engage it puis...on voit". 72 All what Gorbachev did came in disconnected pieces, often contradicting what has been said or done just before, as if by impulse to improvise

72. "First engage in a serious battle and then see what happens" (Napoleon). Lenin "Our Revolution" in Selected Works (Moscow, 1977), vol. 3, p.707.
a solution of the problem right in the hand. Making this approach a virtue he said that all were in a learning process, "we are an emotional people and possibly we shall grow out of that. I do not pretend to know the absolute truth; we have to search for truth together". As it came out, such an apprenticeship-in-reform proved disastrous for the old Soviet system.

Indeed, Gorbachev began his reforms as an on the job training for the Party as well as for himself. For the first two years there was nothing like all out restructuring. The first major documents, like Report at the 27th Congress and the new Party Programme (1986) conveyed eloquently that the system was perfectly good, only it needed a new spirit. The catchwords were 'acceleration' and 'intensification' which meant not structural change but spiritual change in the "style of work" in order to exploit the "reserves of socialism" fully. This was the crux of Gorbachev's message, propagated in different versions for almost two years. It was not clear to anyone how the society would go from here to there as the exhortations were directed at improving human performance than at promoting viable institutional change.

73. M.S. Gorbachev, taking to a group of editors in July 1987. In Doder and Branson, n.59, p. 77.

74. Considering that a Party Programme used to be a durable document it is safe to conclude that Gorbachev's team was not thinking to embark upon any fundamental change. What happened later was nobody's plan.
Democratization and the Party

Democratization was a significant part of Gorbachev's reforms. But here, too, his vision resisted a clarity. He advocated democracy at the grassroots level, e.g., real elections in lower organisations, in local Soviets etc. However, at the higher level the cooption system was not questioned. The Party Rules remained the same, having no provisions to guarantee free elections or to ensure the organisations' control over the apparat. In the clause regarding DC a new point (fifth) was added: "(e) collective spirit in the work of all organisations and leading Party bodies and the personal responsibility of every Communist for the fulfilment of his duties and Party assignments". 75

Obviously, it was not a change or an addition but another good words without substance. After all, the 'collective spirit' was never denied in the Party documents and writing was not happening of the desired thing. The CC Plenum of 28 January 1987 which specially adopted the 'Party's Personnel Policy' was no different on this score. Similarly, speaking at the meeting of the Leningrad Party Organisation on 13 October 1987 Gorbachev said "that the main message of my speech is that the Party must improve the work of all of its

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links, its echelons and levels, and prevent any slowdown, in perestroika by taking the lead at this new and exceptionally important stage". Characteristically, the specific measures as to how the Party should do all this were not here nor there.

Thus, the leader's speeches and documents were full of appeals and adjurations very little to offer concrete steps to move on. Gorbachev himself, at the top, was mostly making wideranging replacements of the Party personnels. This could hardly have served as an example, in order to achieve something substantial, for the party men to follow. However, Gorbachev constantly replaced the officials and was emphatic, "Those who do not intend to adjust and who are an obstacle to solving these new tasks must simply got out of the way. Get out of the way. Don't be a hindrance!" There was no novelty in this organisational practice. In the event, when a clearly formulated course of action was lacking, there was no wonder that personnel changes did not achieve any result in either the Party or the economy except a worsening of situation.

All Gorbachev's exhortatory enterprises began with words and evaporated in words.

77. Doder and Branson, n.59, p.90.
78. In mid'89 a senior official of the CC apparatus emphasised: "inner-Party democracy... got stalled at the pre-perestroika level, while all strata of society have been swept by swift democratization". L. Onikov, "Why is the Vanguard Lagging Behind?" in 'Social Sciences Today' Editorial Board, The Party and Perestroika (Moscow,1990), p.78. Emphasis in original.
Gorbachev's no-different organisational policy (until June 1988) was, perhaps, due to his belief that once he controlled the Party machinery he would be able to bend it according to his wishes. What he apparently missed in his zest was that the Party was deeply conditioned, both ideologically and methodically, under a certain framework. Any endeavour to enliven the Party organisation had to be a protracted, careful effort. Instead Gorbachev and his team was battering incessantly many sacred, axiomatic ideas and customs which were organically linked with the Party. This put the Party at a loss, defenseless and puzzled, where the old methods were no longer required while the replacement was not coming. Gorbachev, for his part, either could not recognise this dilemma or undermined it greatly.

Besides, while the role of the Moscow-based Party apparatus had been greatly increased in conceptualizing and developing new policies, the situation outside Moscow was quite different. Every step to introduce largely self-regulating forces into the economy, and especially to free the media from their traditional restraints considerably weakened the power of the Party apparatus everywhere.  

80. Seweryn Bialer, "Gorbachev's Moves" in Foreign Policy (Washington), n. 68, Fall 1987, p. 73.
That is why Gorbachev's speeches and actions emphasized more on what the Party should not do rather than what it should do: the Party should not impede democratization and openness, it should not discourage private enterprise in agriculture and services, and the movement towards economic mechanisms in planning and management. In sum, the Party was being told to give up all those levers through which it exercised its power! It was tantamount to act against its own interests as the Party understood them. In a way the local Party apparatus was asked to tolerate the changes rather than to participate in it. At the same time, there was no compensating by assigning the Party new functions. It was a great blow to the apparatus of which at the time no side seemed to be fully aware.

The Second Thinking

When the hard realities began pounding away at Gorbachev's programme he came down from the stratosphere of his initial euphoria. Only now he began to feel how complicated, interrelated and deep rooted the problems were. Still he could not adequately realize that they defied easy solutions. His exhortations continued with the familiar urge 'one more last push and our troubles will be over' but without success. When Gorbachev realized that the Party apparatus could not go all-out with his sundry proposals, his frustration
with the Party apparatus started. Apparently, Gorbachev was unable to think of the ways to remould the Party and to provide it with a new role. Besides, he was getting more and more impatient as the economy was sinking and no positive results were in view. So he now turned to 'the people' over the head of the Party. He did it with added vigour to bring the Party into line with his ever-undefined perestroika.

The 19th Party Conference in mid 1988 was a watershed in the Party's life. Not only the spectacular verbal duels, telecasted live throughout the country for the first time, but also the range of spontaneous discussions generated an unprecedented surge of mass interest in politics - 'nothing like it has occurred in our country for nearly the last 60 years'. Indeed, in this conference the General Secretary's report nearly condemned the political-economic system existed in the country for decades. The report conceded, among other things, that not only the Party as a whole but the functioning of the CC was undemocratic; that the democratic centralism was completely replaced by bureaucratic

centralism; that the law of the state was not supreme; that the Party apparatus usurped the functions of Party committees and the latter were mere "rubber stamps"; that the Party apparatus spread piecemeal in every branch of state administration and that the apparatus personnels were not nominated by the primary organisation.\(^83\) All these, incidently, validated the propositions of the non-Soviet scholars which they have been arguing over the decades and which were always branded by the Soviet side as 'falsification' and 'bourgeois propaganda'. It is noteworthy that the report was accepted by the 5,000 delegates at the Conference, many of them were elected in genuine elections.\(^84\) That is to underline, that if the General Secretary's review were incorrect someone would have qualified it in the free-for-all atmosphere of the 19th Conference. Therefore, the report adopted in the Conference must be taken as an authentic review, the frank 'self-criticism' by the Party.

Curiously, while denouncing the existing state-system Gorbachev compared it\(^85\) with the ideal of Lenin in

\(^83\) Ibid., pp. 81,76-77,126-7,137. The last two points were conceded in a later Resolution "On the Main Directions of Restructuring the Party Apparatus" adopted by the CC Plenum on 29 July 1988.

\(^84\) A.L. Unger has studied in detail the elections to the 19th Conference. Though for the most part the elections were thwarted and manipulated by the apparatus, the rank and file could be able to elect many delegates in genuine elections. See "The Travails of Intra-Party Democracy in the Soviet Union: The Elections to the 19th Conference of the CPSU" in Soviet Studies (Glasgow), vol. 43, no.2, 1991.

\(^85\) Gorbachev's Report, n.82, p. 40.
the State and Revolution - but when proposing the alternative he asked for an executive president and an elected parliament (à la U.S.A.). Thus Gorbachev gave both the Politbureau and the CC a backseat. His demand surprised everyone in the Conference which shows how sudden, unexpected and, most of all, ill-thought were his proposals. Gorbachev's outline of the presidential power were overwhelming and an imitation of the American presidency, as he betrayed saying "duties traditionally connected with the Presidency". It is strange to observe that the Conference not only accepted this proposal but also announced a decentralization of power. A significant resolution in this regard was to delimit the functions of the Party and the state. And yet, it was also decided that the Party secretaries everywhere would be the Chairmen of the local Soviets as well! Gorbachev clearly hinted that he himself would be the President as well as the General Secretary of the Party, observing that Lenin too combined top posts. Nice delimitation!

The whole exercise suggested the poor thinking of the

86. Doder and Branson, n.59, p.334.
87. Gorbachev's Report, n.82, pp.54-55.
89. Gorbachev's Report, n.82, p.49.
90. Doder and Branson, n.59, p.334.
leadership and also the intellectual and political mediocrity of the Party since all these contradictory resolutions were passed without much ado. The Conference did not question the propriety of such far reaching proposals which were obviously ill-considered, that too by few individuals.

With such centralized powers for the president Gorbachev sought to democratize the party organisation. Declaring that the stagnation occurred because the Party itself was deformed and ruled under bureaucratic centralism the Conference adopted a number of resolutions: to purify the Party; genuine elections in the Party on the basis of secret ballot, having more candidates than the number of seats; restoration of DC, meaning free discussion and unified action; 'inadmissibility' of the apparatus's usurpation of party organisation's functions; reduction of the size of the apparatus and its subordination to the party committees. In addition, the never-realized ideal also included in the proposals - no more than two consecutive terms in the office only to remain unimplementable.

Thus, Gorbachev was to seize overwhelming power but not as the General Secretary of the Party. He tailored for himself a new post independent of the party and, by this,
for the first time in the last seven decades the role of the Party and the power of the Politbureau officially went down. The Conference, swayed by Gorbachev's rhetoric and mesmerized by the spontaneous and exciting debates, could do little to reinvigorate the Party organisation which was constantly under attack and unable to cope with the new situation.

The Conference was the high-water mark of Gorbachev's new thinking. With this he took, consciously or unconsciously, the first step towards deserting the Party. Another event was that now there existed no systematic, guiding ideas for the Party. During the last two years Gorbachev himself, very irresponsibly, trifled with every idea and institution without replacing any of them with a new one. The ideological conditioning of the populace, in the sense that it had accepted certain 'givens' in the society, was already weakened. The socialism was thoroughly discredited. After the Conference there was no institution which was respected or feared. It generated more confusion. This sudden freedom in a country (and Russia at that) which so far was being ruled by the whole set of established concepts, caused anarchy. Thus a powerful political process began which was no longer in control. Frightening both the supporters and the critics the field was now open for demagogues, manipulators and every sort of new forces. The whole world watched with amazement:
Russia, where are you flying? Give an answer! No answer. With a wondrous peal the little bells ring out; torn into shreds, the air rumbles and turns into wind; everything on earth flies past, and, with a wary look, other nations and states step aside and give way to the flying troika.

(Gegol, Dead Souls)

The Last Phase and the Denouncement

According to the time table adopted at the Nineteenth Party Conference, Gorbachev was to take over the country's new presidency in April 1989. But he was so impatient to establish the 'rule-of-law state' and the 'civil society' that he could not wait. He took over the post of President in its old form in September 1988 and in the process staged the biggest shakeup in the Kremlin since Khrushchev's ouster. It was an act in desperation, reflecting Gorbachev's frustration with the failure of Perestroika in improving the economy.

His act was also a serious assault on the Party because the shakeup ended the CC departments' control over the economy, transferring it to the respective ministries. Thus, the Party apparatus was removed from economic decision-making. To end the overlapping responsibilities and lack of accountability it was a step in right direction, nevertheless
it diffused the Party apparatus. On the other hand, one man had again acquired unlimited power even though Gorbachev said that he did not want to become a "tsar or dictator". Such concentration of power disturbed many of his supporters. The sudden increase of movements for greater autonomy and sovereignty in the Baltic republics after these changes was an indicator of the uneasiness caused by it.

Having all power in hands Gorbachev, in his new year address (1989), could offer to the people only a "maximally objective and truthful" account of the country's economic difficulties since "the truth is the highest satisfaction for our people".\(^{92}\) As the economy did not show any sign of revival, Gorbachev's disappointment with the Party was gradually increasing. For which institution else was there to be angry with? There were only two - the President and the Party. If the President was doing everything in his capacity then it must be the Party's responsibility for the economic failure!

However, in a close examination Gorbachev's dissatisfaction (not the people's) was not very justified. The Party always endorsed every single proposal of the General Secretary. The problem was that while demolishing

\(^{92}\) Doder and Branson, n. 59, p. 361.
the 'administrative-command system' Gorbachev failed to give the Party a clear sense of what should replace it.

If order was torn asunder in high society, and a new one not given, at least there was the consolation that the common people were all in order. Any sort at all, but in order, for there remains this bond, a most strong one...But they will break this bond too - and what then? There is no new one yet, nothing has come up...but out with the old, root and all, - and what will be left?

(Dostoyevsky, Diary of Writer, 1876).

To confound the Party the view was at the top where all power was concentrated in one post. By this what could have been understood? Another perplexity was the opening of all conceivable problems at the same time for which neither adequate preparation nor responsible machinaries were made. Boris Yeltsin had argued at one time that the Party should concentrate on just one or two tasks, food crisis for one, rather than expend energy on everything. Gorbachev rejected this proposal, making it more difficult for the Party as well as for himself to tackle the problems effectively.

Therefore, by enlarging the aspects of restructuring and resolving none of them both the President and the Party started to lose their strength. Given the Gorbachev's style

93. Ibid., p.380.
it could not have been otherwise. Because his speeches, full of preachiness, used to mention the results the wanted. But he was invariably blank on how to attain the desired result. For instance, in the report at the CC meeting on 18 July 1989 Gorbachev called the party organisations "to bring about a radical improvement in the economy", while as to the specific steps to be taken by the party bodies he stated his 'principled proposition': "...up to now many believed that economic policy was a job for the centre. No, Comrades, developing policy is something that should be done at every level of the Party". Strange naiveté! Every level its own economist. This style, a different type of Oblomivism, was bound to fail in giving results, especially when all information was monopolised at the centre.

The article The Socialist Idea and Revolutionary Perestroika written by Gorbachev in November 1989 gives a fair idea of his exasperation. Philosophising on various cardinal issues of socialism he put many a question marks on various concepts without, characteristically, proposing an answer. Beginning with "where are we going?" the article concludes that "by the 28th Party Congress we shall be able

to draw the main outlines of a new socialism and draw up a theoretically sound programme of action for the future". For the time being, he had none.

Naturally, then, the popular feeling was that of hopelessness and despair. A joke circulating in Moscow in early 1990 captured the mood: "There are two ways - one realistic, the other fantastic - for resolving the crisis of the Soviet economy. The realistic way is to have people from outer space come and straighten out the mess. The fantastic way is for the Soviet people to sort it out on their own". The country had lost its confidence and its way. The leaders would not accept that they did not know the way out but Gorbachev's increasingly drab speeches betrayed the reality. The people no longer listened to them. Neither Gorbachev was able to show his original optimism any more.

Gradually the Party was becoming irrelevant. After the destruction of the apparatus its authority was considerably weakened. The situation was manifested at the May-day Parade


96. After the end of the CC departments in the economy it were '89 elections for the new parliament which finished the apparatus, as most top officials lost despite carefully managed elections. (It was a measure of Gorbachev's confidence that he did not face the elections even without another candidate in the constituency. He got himself in through the quotas given to the Party). Of late, Gorbachev believed that it was the apparatus which blocked the success of perestroika. So he was probably happy with its destruction.
in 1990 in which a startled Gorbachev watched from the top of Lenin's Mausoleum the fist-shaking protests chanting "Resign", "Shame" and wavering banners "Dictator = President without elections", "Seventy-two years on the Road to Nowhere" etc.

Exactly one month later Gorbachev concluded:

And we understood that, really, we were being very naive because that system, that system which evolved over decades, was really a kind of vice, a kind of clamp on our entire national economy, and it made impossible any initiative, decision making at various levels... We have dismantled the old system but we have not yet put in place an effective system, a new system, and our ship has lost anchor. Therefore we are all a little sick... 97

The 28th Party Congress (July 1990) was a curious affair. it recorded the futility of the previous seven decades, the degradation of the system based on lies and coercion and the emptiness of convictions that echoed repeatedly in the same Palace of Congresses. But such statements surprised nobody. Rest was a charade: calls for discipline, platitudes about perestroika and socialism, demands to strengthen the Party. No one was inspired. The words had lost their meaning. In all practical sense, the Leninist Party was no more.

97. In a meeting with U.S. Congressional Leaders on 1 June 1990 in Washington, quoted in Dodor and Branson, n.59, p. 423.
Now it was an organisation with no identity and it was only a matter of time to wind it up and, if possible, start something new. The August putsch\(^98\) of 1991 provided the opportunity. Otherwise, it seems quite incongruous that for a putsch done by few individuals in secrecy a whole organisation of millions should be punished. But precisely this was done by Boris Yeltsin, the President of the Russian Federation and also by Gorbachev after he resigned from the post of General Secretary. In his book *The August Coup* (1991) Gorbachev himself has written that in the Party there were "millions of communists, honest people who have done nothing to stain their reputation". Then why the blanket ban? Because, explains Gorbachev, "the Coup wiped out any hope of reforming the CPSU and turning it into a modern, democratic party. That is why I resigned the post of General Secretary and proposed that the Central Committee should dissolve itself".\(^99\) Even this last act of the last General Secretary was autocratic and in contravention of the Party Rules.

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98. The putsch led by eight central leaders did not collapse, rather it did not took off. It petered out even before the protests were visible.