CHAPTER IV

NEW EDITION OF THE CPSU PROGRAMME AND RESTRUCTURING OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM
As noted earlier, the exaggerated hopes and impractical dreams of the Khrushchevian era, as reflected in the 1961 programme, had long been recognized in both the policy and ideological spheres. The whole trajectory of Soviet development since the removal of Khrushchev in 1964 reflected a move away from the enthusiasm of that period. In the ideological sphere this was reflected in the expounding of the concept of 'Developed Socialism' in the late sixties and early seventies. The characterization of the Soviet society as a developed socialist society by the Brezhnev leadership was significant in that it lengthened the time span for the transition of Soviet society into communism. The Brezhnev leadership did not question the process of the evolution of the Soviet state into the 'State of the whole people'. Rather this concept was popularized more and more in the seventies.

Subsequent leaders have been at pains to emphasize that the stage of developed socialism would
not be short. Yuri Andropov declared that "the Soviet Union was only at the beginning of this long historical stage".¹ His successor Chernenko also argued: "...developed socialism would comprise an entire historical epoch and would have its own specific stages".² While Mikhail Gorbachev referred to it as an "historically protracted stage".³

Immediately after becoming the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev took upon himself the task of convening the Twenty-seventh Congress of the CPSU. He called a Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the Party in April 1985 for the preparations for the Congress and to decide its agenda. One of the items on the agenda of the forthcoming congress was the updating of the CPSU programme. This Congress was of paramount importance, according to Gorbachev, because its significance lay in its description of the "characteristic features of the current period and the scope of the tasks facing society".⁴ Gorbachev hinted

² Ibid., no. 18, 1984, p. 8.
³ Pravda, 11 December 1984.
⁴ Mikhail Gorbachev, Selected Speeches and Articles (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), p. 17.
in his speech at "the infavourable trends" that have
grown in the last few years and quite a few difficulties
have arisen, though he did not deny "the successes achieved
in the country's economic development". 5 He, therefore,
asked the Central Committee to "fully and profoundly grasp
the situation...and draw some basic conclusions", and also
emphasized on "the need for acceleration" 6 of economic
development. Gorbachev's speech at the Plenary Meeting
of the Central Committee in April 1985 was a prelude to
the revised programme of the CPSU which was published in
draft form in October. The Twenty-Seventh Congress which
was held in March 1986 approved and adopted the New
Edition of the existing 1961 Programme.

THE NEW EDITION (1986) OF CPSU PROGRAMME :
A BLEND OF THE OLD AND NEW ELEMENTS

The New Edition of the CPSU Programme was
essentially a continuation of the 1961 Programme. It
did not break any new theoretical grounds as its predecessors
did. Like the usual practice in the earlier programmes the

5 Ibid., p. 18.
6 Ibid.
New Edition also upheld the validity of its ancestors in historical perspective. It confirmed the correctness of the theoretical and political pronouncements of not only of the 1919 and 1961 programmes but also of the Brezhnev leadership.

However, the New Edition of the Programme emphasized the need to take into consideration the internal changes in the USSR and the changes in modern world so that the internal and external tasks of the Soviet Union could be defined more concretely. Gorbachev in his Political Report to the Twenty-Seventh Congress of the CPSU also pleaded for working out "a realistic, well-thought out programme of action" to bring the aims and ideals in conformity with the realities and capabilities of the USSR. The thrust of the New Edition was on the realistic assessment of developments within and outside the USSR.

The novelty and significance of the Gorbachevian Programme lay in its critical assessment of the socio-economic and political developments in the past. Though

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in a milder form, notwithstanding its glorification of the previous programmes at the same time. It was critical, though indirectly, of the over-optimism of the 1919 and 1961 programmes regarding the building of a communist society in the USSR. It noted: "Any attempts to move ahead too fast and to introduce communist principles without taking into consideration the levels of material and spiritual maturity of society are, as experience has shown, doomed to failure and may cause both economic and political losses". 8

Gorbachev also pointed out to the Congress the mistakes of the Brezhnev era in a forthright and straightforward manner. He told the Congress:

...For a number of years the deeds and actions of Party and Government bodies lagged behind the needs of the times and life - not only because of objective factors, but also for reasons above all of a subjective nature. The problems in the country's development grew more rapidly than they were being solved. The inertness and rigidity of the forms and methods of management, the decline of dynamism in our work, and increased bureaucracy - all this was doing no small damage. Signs of stagnation had begun to surface in the life of society. The situation called for change, but a peculiar

psychology - how to improve things without changing anything - took the upper hand in the central bodies and for that matter, at the local levels as well. 9

The new Soviet leadership thus, critically analysed the shortcomings of the Soviet society which were also mentioned in the New Edition of the Programme. Also reflected in the New Edition of the Programme was a new political thinking. The elements of this thinking would be reflected in the discussion that follows on the programmatic perspectives in the following major areas.

(i) **Social and Economic Sphere**

The 27th CPSU Congress objectively assessed the achievements and failures of the previous regimes. The prevalent notion regarding the correspondence of production relations to the nature of productive forces as popularized in the 70s and 80s came under severe criticism. Gorbachev decried the hollowness of such ideas as follows:

9 Gorbachev, n. 7, p. 3.
Practice has revealed the insolvency of the ideas that under the conditions of socialism the conformity of production relations to the nature of productive forces is ensured automatically, as it were. In real life, everything is more complicated. Indeed, the socialist production relations open up broad vistas for development of the productive forces. However, they must be constantly improved. 10

Gorbachev's criticism of the false notions as reflected in the above quoted lines was taken note of in the New Edition of the Programme. Consequently, in the social and economic sphere, the improvement of socialist production relations was defined as an urgent task in the revised programme. It noted:

Constant improvement of production relations, which should always correspond to the dynamically developing productive forces, and identification and resolution in good time of non-antagonistic contradictions arising between them are vital pre-requisites for accelerating socio-economic progress. 11

Yegor Ligachev, a prominent member of the CPSU politbureau, also decried the theoretical formulations of the past leadership in critical areas like nature of social structure, productive forces and production relations in the USSR. Ligachev asserted:

10 Ibid., p. 49.

11 "The Programme", n. 8, p. 35.
The country's previous leadership proved no match for the problems at hand. All too often, it evaded pressing economic and political issues.

Theoretical thought lagged far behind. Over the past few decades our notions of socialism had in many ways remained in a solidified immobile state. Sanctioned in an authoritarian manner, they became incontestable and 'absolute' varieties subject to nothing more than commenting. Society's socio-economic structure was held to be ideal. As a result nothing was done to pinpoint its intrinsic contradictions and to eliminate them promptly. And if any pertinent theoretical studies did appear, they were not applied in practice on any large scale. Their verification did not involve other socio-economic areas, and failed to yield the due effect. 12

The methods of economic management that evolved in the past became a breaking mechanism in the economic and social spheres. While describing this phenomenon Gorbachev told the Congress:

The forms of production relations and the economic management and guidance system now in operation took shape, basically, in the conditions of extensive economic development. These gradually grew out of date, began to loose their stimulating effect and in some respects became a brake. 13


13 Gorbachev, n. 7, p. 50.
Thus, the critical and somewhat objective analysis of the past helped the Soviet leadership to make a realistic assessment and than to define its tasks in the revised party programme. The concept of 'acceleration' which was the recurring theme of the New Edition of the programme, in fact set the tone and tenor of 'the strategic line' of the party in the preamble itself. The 'updated edition' of the programme could rightly be described as a blueprint for the "accelerated socio-economic development". The essence of 'acceleration' according to R.R. Sharma, meant the refinement of socialism, improvement of the management system and distribution and gradual dissolution of social and class relations. The programme defined the concept of acceleration as -

a radical renewal of its (Soviet Society's) material and technical foundation on the basis of the achievements of social relations, above all economic ones; profound changes in the content and nature of labour and in the material and cultural conditions of the life of the people; and invigoration of the entire system of political, social and ideological institutions.

14 "The Programme", n. 8, p. 5.
16 "The Programme", n. 8, p. 27.
The acceleration of the society's socio-economic development was not possible without developing the creative activity of the people, stated the programme. Linked with 'acceleration' was the emphasis in the Programme on the 'increase in the role of the human factor', which meant the 'conscious and active participation of the millions of people' in the achievement of the goals of the programme.

Some of the measures suggested in the section of the programme entitled "The CPSU's Tasks in Perfecting Socialism and Making a Gradual Transition to Communism", for the accelerated socio-economic development were:

(a) Structural changes in the economy for its intensive development, raising the productivity of labour and introduction of advanced technology to improve the quality of products.

(b) The distribution of productive forces to ensure the economy of social labour and the comprehensive and highly efficient development of each region and each republic.

(c) A steady improvement of the living and working conditions of the people, drawing closer together of all classes and social groups and strata, overcoming
essential distinctions between mental and physical work, between town and countryside.

(d) The development of productive forces in agriculture, the development of inter-farm cooperation and agro-industrial-integration.

(e) To organize planning on the basis of democratic centralism and to develop cost accounting.

(f) Improvement of relations in the sphere of distribution to enhance collective and personal interest in the development of social production.

The above mentioned measures in the social and economic spheres as proposed in the New Edition of the Programme were meant to overcome stagnation and to remove the breaking mechanism that had crept in the Soviet system in the past.

(ii) The Nationalities Policy

The problem of nationalities had always been the achilles heel of the Soviet system and Gorbachev in his report to the 27th Congress accepted the persistence of national isolation, localism and parasitism. It is interesting to note here that the section on nationalities contained a warning against "artificial prodding nor
holding back of the objective trends of development\textsuperscript{17} to improve the integration of different nationalities. Despite this warning the programme noted with satisfaction that the nationalities question had been successfully solved. At the same time the programme reiterated the commitment of the CPSU "to continue the struggle against any manifestations of parochialism and national narrow-mindedness\textsuperscript{18}.

The New Edition of the programme envisaged the "increasing role of the republics, autonomous regions and autonomous areas in carrying out countrywide tasks and for promoting the active involvement of working people of all nationalities in the work of government and administrative bodies\textsuperscript{19}.

The programme ensured the right of different nationalities to 'use their native languages'. But it stressed the primacy of the Russian language as 'a means of communication between different nationalities', and to broaden the Soviet people's access to the achievements of science and technology and of world culture.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 47.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
(iii) Foreign Policy

The significant aspect of the New Edition of the Programme in the sphere of foreign policy lay in the recognition by the Gorbachevian leadership, of the process of contraction of the modern world in time and space. In his speech to the 27th Congress he noted: "The interconnection between states and between peoples is increasing. And all this is setting new, especially exacting demands upon every state, whether it is a matter of foreign policy, economic and social activity, or the spiritual image of the society." The Programme considered the threat of a thermo-nuclear war as the dominant factor in international relations and as one of the crucial issues in the relationships between the USA and the USSR. The threat of a nuclear war pervades the entire Programme. The revised Programme pleaded that "it is possible to avert war and to save mankind from catastrophe". This

20 Gorbachev, n. 7, p. 8.
21 "The Programme", n. 8, p. 23.
document placed a special responsibility for the prevention of a nuclear war on the states possessing nuclear weapons particularly the USA and the USSR.

The Programme proposed the ending of arms race and the achievement of complete disarmament, complete elimination of nuclear armaments by the end of 20th century. Most important and notable proposal in the Programme was the "simultaneous dissolution of NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation", and at the same time it warned that the USSR would not permit an upset in the "military-strategic equilibrium" between the USA and the USSR. 22

The Programme proposed that the relationship between USA and the USSR and also between capitalist countries and USSR must be based on mutual trust and on the principle of equality and equal security. The differences between different social systems and ideologies should not strain the relations.

The revised Programme like its predecessor reaffirmed its commitment of expanding relations with the newly free countries and reiterated the Soviet Union's support to these countries in their struggle.

22 Ibid., p. 77.
against neo-colonialism and imperialism. But it attached special importance to the relationship between the USSR and the countries with "socialist-oriented" paths of development.

The section in the New Edition dealing with the relations between the USSR and socialist countries was on the expected lines. This section is in the mould of the previous Programme. The New Edition divided the socialist countries into two categories. In the first category, it included the countries of 'socialist community' while in the second category it included 'all other socialist countries'. In the latter, perhaps the hint was towards China, Albania and Yugoslavia. The Programme stressed the need of 'all-round strengthening of relations of friendship' between the USSR and socialist countries. The notable emphasis in the Programme was on the 'deepening of socialist economic integration as the material foundation for drawing the socialist countries closer together'.

The above discussion suggests that a critical analysis of the past and a realistic assessment of the tasks to be accomplished in the USSR, as reflected in

23 Ibid., p. 67.
the pre and post 27th Congress documents as well as in the New Edition of the CPSU Programme, constituted a 'New Political Thinking'. The main elements of this thinking were concepts like 'Acceleration', 'Role of Human Factor', and 'Elimination of the Threat of a Nuclear War', to mention a few. The new thinking was also reflected in the Gorbachevian leadership's concern for the restructuring of the Soviet political system. This will be reflected in the course of discussions that follow in this chapter.

THE NEW EDITION OF THE PROGRAMME AND THE SOVIET STATE

The revised version of the Party Programme did not break any new grounds in theory in its evaluation of the process of the evolution of Soviet society and state. Rather it repeated the claim that after 1961 the Soviet society "entered the stage of developed socialism", and "the proletarian state has become a state of the whole people". The Programme considered the Soviet state as

24 Ibid., p. 4.
25 Ibid., p. 49.
"the main tool for perfecting socialism" internally, while at the international level "it performs the functions of upholding the socialist gains, strengthening the positions of world socialism, countering the aggressive policy of imperialist forces and developing cooperation with all nations."26 The revised programme charted out the future trajectory of development of the Soviet state as follows:

The CPSU believes that at the present stage the strategic line of development of the political system of Soviet society consists in advancing Soviet democracy and increasingly promoting 'socialist self-government' by the people on the basis of active and effective participation of working people, their collectives and organisations in decision making concerning the affairs of state and society. 27

The main trend projected for the political sphere was further enhancement of socialist self-government with greater participation by citizens in the life of state and social organization. The Communist Party was assigned the key responsibility of

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
supervizing the work of the Soviet state and other public and social organizations. The programme retained the Party as "the leading force and the nucleus of the political system of Soviet society". The Programme held that -

It is a matter of key importance for the Party’s policy to develop and strengthen the Soviet socialist state and increasingly reveal its democratic nature as a state of the whole people and its creative and constructive role. 29

As far as the social basis of the 'state of the whole people' is concerned, the Programme reiterated the "drawing closer together of the working class, the collective farm peasantry and the intelligentsia, and the establishment of a classless structure of society with the working class playing the decisive role in that process". 30 The programme alluded to the gradual elimination of differences between physical and mental labour, between town and country but omitted references

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., p. 50.
30 Ibid., p. 45.
to the earlier emphasis on 'homogeneous Soviet society' during the Brezhnev period. Rather the programme struck a note of caution on the issue of elimination of social differences. It stated: "The complete elimination of these differences (social differences) and the formation of a socially homogeneous society will take place at the supreme phase of communism." 31

The existence of class differences was accepted by the programme and it noted that "as long as such differences exist, the party considers it a matter of foremost importance to take careful account in its policies of the distinctive features characterising the interests of the classes and social groups". 32

The Programme also noted with satisfaction that the nationalities problem had been solved in the USSR. It stated that -

the nationalities question inherited from the past has been successfully solved in the Soviet Union. Characteristic of the national relations in our country are both the continued flourishing of the nations and nationalities and the

31 Ibid., p. 46.
32 Ibid.
fact that they are steadily and voluntarily drawing closer together on the basis of equality and fraternal cooperation. 33

The programme, therefore, dropped the reference to the emergence of Soviet Union as a 'historic community of Soviet peoples'. Rather it warned that "neither artificial prodding nor holding back of the objective trends of development is admissible here". 34

The remarkable feature of the New Edition of the Programme was that it took note of the negative processes both in the sphere of economy and polity. The Programme mentioned, though modestly, the negative phenomenon. It said:

Along with undeniable successes the 1970's and early 1980's saw certain unfavourable trends and difficulties in country's development. To a great extent, these were due to the failure to assess appropriately and in good time changes in the economic situation and the need for profound transformations in all spheres of life, and to a lack of persistence in carrying them out. 35

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., p. 47.
35 Ibid., p. 27.
Mikhail Gorbachev had also referred to the shortcomings of the Soviet system in his Report to the 27th Congress. The negative developments were explained by Gorbachev to the Congress as follows:

For a number of years the deeds and actions of Party and Government bodies lagged behind the needs of the times and of life - not only because of objective factors, but also for reasons above all of a subjective nature. The problems in the country's development grew more rapidly than they were being solved. The inertness and rigidity of the forms and methods of management, the decline of dynamism in our work, and increased bureaucracy - all this was doing no small damage. Signs of stagnation had begun to surface in the life of the society. 36

Gorbachev was also critical of the concept of 'developed socialism' though he was very mild in tone and tenor. According to him:

36 Gorbachev, n. 7, p. 3.
shifted. Things were not infrequently reduced to just registering successes, while many of the urgent problems related to the switching over of the economy to intensification, to raising labour productivity, improving supplies to the population and overcoming negative things were not given due attention. 37

Keeping in mind the utopian goals and over-enthusiasm of the 1961 Programme regarding the 'Construction of Communism' in the USSR and later on the slowing down of economic development and all round stagnation of the Soviet society, Gorbachev asked the Congress "to work out a realistic, well thought out programme of action that would organically blend the grandeur of our aims with our real capabilities, and the party's plans with the hopes and aspirations of every person'. 38 The emphasis on realism was also reflected in the Party programme. The Programme warned that -

Any attempts to move ahead too fast and to introduce communist principles without taking into consideration the levels of material and spiritual maturity of society are, as experience

37 Ibid., pp. 121-2.

38 Ibid., p. 2.
has shown, doomed to failure and may cause both economic and political losses. 39

In the programme, the process of withering away of the state had been, therefore, postponed to the remote future.

In the New Edition of the Programme, and in Gorbachev's Report to the 27th Congress of the CPSU, there was decreasing emphasis on the state of the whole people and some kind of tuning down of the theory of developed socialism and the state of the whole people. Before the 27th Congress, which adopted the New Edition of the CPSU Programme, Gorbachev was trying to grasp the accumulated socio-economic and political problems of the USSR and to chalk out a strategy to overcome them. The process of grasping the problems started with the April 1985 Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the CPSU. In his speech to the Central Committee, Gorbachev argued: "We must comrades, fully and profoundly grasp the situation that has taken shape and draw some basic conclusions". 40


The New Edition of the Programme was a sort of compromise programme. It did not deny the nature of the Soviet state as the 'state of whole people' nor did it put extra-emphasis on it. Here we find that although references were made to the negative developments, but there were no serious attempts to redefine the political system. It was, perhaps, due to the fact that Gorbachev had very limited period at his disposal after getting elected the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985 and the holding of 27th Congress of the CPSU in March 1986. He had, according to Gail Lapidus, yet to formulate a comprehensive strategy for change.\(^4^1\) This was the period when Gorbachev was trying to consolidate his power.

**STRATEGY FOR THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF SOVIET SOCIETY AND STATE: THE 19TH ALL-UNION CONFERENCE OF THE CPSU**

Mikhail Gorbachev formulated his policy of democratization of Soviet society and state at the Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the CPSU

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in January 1987. After the 27th Party Congress which was held in March 1986, Gorbachev told the Central Committee Meeting that the leadership now knew more about the problems of society and state. He emphasized on "the need to examine once again and in detail the sources of the obtaining situation and to sort out the reasons for what took place in the country in the later 1970s and early 1980s". 42

The January Plenum of Central Committee of the CPSU was significant for two obvious reasons. Firstly, the problems of Soviet society and political system were not only identified but were pin-pointed. Secondly, this Plenum broadly defined the strategy of democratization. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the unfolding Gorbachevian strategy and the subsequent socio-economic and political developments had their origins in the formulations of this plenum. Gorbachev identified the problems afflicting the Soviet system, which he also incorporated in his book entitled, _Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World_, published in the same year. He identified the following

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problems, broadly:

(i) Serious shortcomings in the functioning of the institutions of socialist democracy. The prevalence and rather propagation of outdated political and theoretical concepts, which did not correspond to reality.

(ii) In the past, the dialectics, motive forces and contradictions and the actual conditions of society did not become the subject of in-depth scientific research, and

(iii) Social diversification in the USSR was either neglected or dismissed simplistically. An ossified concept of socialist relations of production appeared and their dialectical interaction with the productive forces was underestimated. The social structure of society was viewed schematically, without the contradictions and dynamism of various interests of its different strata and groups

Lastly, but not the least, Gorbachev summed up the key problems as under:

43 Ibid., pp. 10-12.
(iv) Key problems such as public ownership, relations between classes and nationalities, the measure of work and the measure of consumption, cooperation, methods of economic management, people's rule and self-government struggle against bureaucratic abuses, the revolutionary transforming character of socialist ideology, the principles of education and upbringing, and guarantees for the healthy development of Party and society, were interpreted simplistically, and their theoretical depth and significance were often emaciated.

The problems identified at the January Plenum clearly suggested that Gorbachev started challenging the Brezhnevian 'homogenising' notion and he did not refer to the concept of the 'state of the whole people'. This may be precisely due to the fact that the acceptance of social diversities and existence of interests of different classes and strata in the Soviet society had a direct bearing on the characterization of the Soviet state. The need for recognition of divergent social interests was also emphasized by Soviet economists and sociologists before Gorbachev had come to power. Tatyana Zaslavskaya, in fact had argued as early as 1983, about the "production
relations falling behind the level of the development of the productive forces". 44

Zaslavaskaya had also urged in her report that

The 'Model' for production relations worked out by Soviet science and which corresponds to the present level of the development of the productive forces, must take into consideration the complications, the 'multi-dimensionality' and frequently even the conflict of interests of the groups operating in the economic structure, the regular pattern of their behaviour and inter-dependence, the substance of their 'dialogue', with the social institutions and organs of economic management. 45

The democratization of Soviet society, Gorbachev told the Plenary Session, was an urgent task. To develop the public self-government, Gorbachev, mooted the idea of introduction of the principle of electivity in management and the promotion of inner-party democracy.

It is at the 19th Party Conference held in June-July 1988, that Gorbachev very frankly and in a


straightforward manner pointed to the distortion of the process of the evolution of the Soviet state. He was now speaking not of the Soviet state but about the political system, the latter included the Communist Party as well. The distortion of the process of the evolution of the Soviet political system was described by Gorbachev as follows:

That at a certain stage the political system established as a result of the October Revolution underwent serious deformations. This made possible the omnipotence of Stalin and his entourage, and the wave of repressive measures and lawlessness. The command methods of administration that arose in those years had a dire effect on various aspects of the development of our society. 46

During the Brezhnev period, which Gorbachev described as the 'period of stagnation', the state and its apparatuses encompassed the entire gamut of Soviet life. The features of the Soviet state during the stagnation period were noted by Gorbachev as follows:

While functions of economic management became increasingly concentrated in the

hands of the Party – political leadership, the role of the executive apparatus at the same time increased out of all proportions. 47

The state apparatus became highly inflated as the number of people elected to the various governmental and non-governmental bodies reached of one-third of the total adult population, Gorbachev told the Conference. During this period, the state became a leviathan. Even the Soviets and the Party bodies as well, proved unable to control the pressure from ministries and governmental agencies. Another important negative feature of the distorted evolution of the political system which Gorbachev highlighted was "the universal rule that the body taking the decisions bore no responsibility for the implication of its actions". 48

The state became an all pervading phenomenon in the Soviet society. Elaborating this aspect Gorbachev noted:

State regulation was extended to an inordinately broad sphere of public activities. The tendency to encompass

47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
every sphere of life with detailed centralised planning and control literally straight-jacketed society and became a serious break on the initiative of people, public organisations, and collectives. 49

The growing omnipotence of the over-inflated Soviet state apparatus and the consequences were summed up by Gorbachev very lucidly:

With state structures bureaucratised and the people's social creativity impaired, society became accustomed to single option and static thinking. A simplified, stunted image of socialist government by the people arose and still persists in influencing people's thinking, with the actual administration of power being identified not with the people's political activity, but above all with the executive agencies. 50

Thus, Gorbachev was not rejecting explicitly the concept of the state of the whole people nor was he theorizing on the concept of state in socialism. Gorbachev's averseness to the idea of the state of the whole people was implicit in his remarks which he also

49 Ibid., p. 40.
50 Ibid.
made at the 19th Party Conference. He said:

We all know that our state was born as a tool of a working class dictatorship; at the turn of the 1960's the conclusion was made that it was gradually evolving into a state of the whole people. But the deeper we delve into the content of the political process, the more obvious it becomes that our state must be made a people's state in the full sense of the term. This means we should organise state power and government so that the people would always have the final say and the process of self-regulation and self-government would be given the widest possible scope. 51

The diagnosis of ills of the Soviet state rather of the political system implicitly suggested that the Soviet state enjoyed some kind of relative autonomy from the civil society. Though Gorbachev did not theorize on this aspect, yet, we can discern the theme of autonomy of the state from social classes in the Soviet society running like a thread in his speeches and statements. The Soviet theorists like Fyodor Burlatsky and Anatoly Butenko, who in the early sixties

51 Ibid., p. 47.
and late seventies theorized and propagated the concept of the 'state of the whole people', changed their positions according to the new Party line. The relative autonomy of the Soviet state was accepted by Burlatsky in one of his articles. He wrote:

\[ T \]he experience of Soviet construction has shown that socialism, too, is not free from a definite tendency towards the state's relative independence. That is, of course, far from saying that some kind of special stratum or class comes on the scene to stand over and above the society and to command it. 52

In another article Burlatsky referred to, though indirectly, too much emphasis on Statism in the USSR, which also indirectly implied the autonomy of the Soviet state from the civil society. He wrote:

\[ I \]t was Stalin, not Lenin, who pro­pounded the theory that it is the state, not the working class and its Party, that had a crucial role to play in socialist development.

Although Brezhnev was the first of our leaders who no longer promised that Communism would be built within the life

time of one generation, he was a staunch believer in the omnipotence of the state and its organisational clout. 53

According to Anatoly Butenko the phenomenon of the independence of the Soviet state was "the by-product of the mechanism of administrative-bureaucratic usurpation of class rule, historically established in the society". 54 Butenko further elaborated the phenomenon of statism and the autonomy of the Soviet state in the following terms:

In state policy, this power (the power of the state) was a well thought out hierarchy of posts, a system exercising a direct centralised guidance of the state over the entire economic activity and all aspects of social life. 55

This was reflected, according to Butenko, in the concentration of all-embracing power in the hands of a stratum of leaders-administrators appointed from the top and unaccountable to the people. 56 From the above


55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.
discussion, we can infer that the civil society in the USSR was subordinate to the state.

The 19th Party Conference, therefore, called for the "restructuring of government bodies and for the amendment of existing constitution". The Conference also put forward the following main tasks for the reform of the political system: 57

(i) To give the widest possible scope to the self-governance of the Soviet society, and to create favourable conditions to encourage the initiative of individuals and representative bodies.

(ii) To strengthen the socialist legality, prevention of usurption and abuse of power and to effectively combat bureaucratic attitudes.

(iii) To enhance the legislative, managerial and supervisory functions of the Soviets and the transfer of decision-making powers to them on all important questions relating to government, and the economic and socio-cultural spheres, and to restore the prerogative of elective bodies over the executive and over the apparatus.

57 The 19th All Union Conference of the CPSU, n. 46, pp. 130-1.
Reform of the political system inevitably meant the reform of the Party as well. This was all necessary because, as Gorbachev told the Conference,

the principle of democratic centralism, which underlies the structure and activity of the CPSU, was at a certain stage largely replaced by bureaucratic centralism, and rank and file party members had largely lost their ability to influence Party policy. When the command style of administration got established, the atmosphere of party comradeship was gradually giving way to relations based on orders and their execution on the division of Party members into chiefs and subordinates. 58

The Party, Gorbachev suggested, must remodel its activity and resume its proper role of political vanguard. He recommended the ending of any quotas and bureaucratic methods.

The 19th Party Conference of the CPSU was a landmark in more than one sense as far as its evaluation of the Soviet state was concerned. Firstly, at this conference the deformations in the evolutionary process of Soviet statehood were exposed. The prevalent notions of developed socialism and state of the whole people

58 Ibid., pp. 76-77.
were tacitly rejected. Secondly, the omnipotence of the Soviet state and its apparatuses were recognized. From the analysis of this conference one could infer the prevalence of the 'Bonapartist' phenomenon - i.e., the relative autonomy of the state vis-a-vis the social classes in the USSR. The degeneration of the principle of democratic centralism into bureaucratic centralism and the rise of administrative command apparatus was accepted by the leadership. The need for a rule-of-law state was emphasized and the reform of Soviets was put on the top of the agenda.

Renewal of the Soviet Political System

Immediately following the 19th Party Conference, the Soviet leadership prepared a calendar of political renewal which was published in the month of August 1988. The calendar of political renewal divided the process into the following three stages. 59

(i) **First Stage** (October 1988- December 1988)

The important tasks to be completed at this stage were identified as (a) Publication of drafts of

the Law on changes and Additions to the USSR Constitution and the Law on Election of People's Deputies in the USSR, and (b) Convening of the session of the USSR Supreme Soviet, in November to discuss and approve the above mentioned drafts, and (c) By the start of 1989, the preparation of materials on questions of improving inter-ethnic relations in the USSR.

(ii) Second Stage (March-April 1989)

During this period, the draft Law on local self-government and local economy and the elections of people's deputies of the USSR and convocation of the USSR Congress of People's Deputies were identified as the main tasks.

(iii) Third Stage (Middle of 1989 to Autumn of 1989)

The main task during this period was the reform of courts and restructuring of public procurators' office, i.e., legal reforms, to be completed and lastly elections to the Republican and local Soviets.

To implement the first item on the agenda of Political Renewal a special session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR was called in November 1988. This session of the Supreme Soviet approved the changes to
existing Soviet constitution and Democratization of the system of Soviets.

The Constitutional changes in November 1988 were a serious attempt towards institution building in the USSR. These changes were meant to rectify the 'abberations' and serious deformations of the past. The changes introduced in the constitution of 1977 were the first step in the reinvigoration of the ossified political system and an effort to bridge the gap between the official proclaimed democratic principles and the actual practice of the political process. The first stage of political reforms as codified in the changes to the constitution was basically concerned with the reform of the Soviets and the electoral system. Mikhail Gorbachev, in his speech to the special session of Supreme Soviet divided the elements of the Constitutional changes in the following categories: 60

(i) The establishment of a system of congresses of People's Deputies; the transformation of the USSR Supreme Soviet with a permanently functioning body.

(ii) The setting up of a Committee for Constitutional Supervision.

(iii) The radical democratization of elections and the direct representation of public organization in higher bodies of power.

These constitutional changes were considered as a take-off stage "without which, it is impossible to begin the formation of a new structure of the Soviets and to launch a political reform".61

The novelty of the Constitutional amendments lay in the creation of the Congress of People's Deputies (introduced in Article 89 of the 1977 Constitution) both at the republican and national level. The amended Article 108 defined the Congress of People's Deputies as the highest body of state authority of the USSR. According to the amended Article 111 of the Constitution, the Congress of People's Deputies would elect the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. This body according to Article 111 shall re-elect one-fifth of the deputies to the Supreme Soviet

61 Ibid., p. 12.
of the USSR, i.e. the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities. The Congress of People's Deputies had a parallel in the All-Russia Congress of Soviets of the 1918 Constitution of the RSFSR (Article 24 of the 1918 Constitution). The elections of deputies to this body from territorial electoral districts, from the national-territorial electoral districts, from the national-territorial electoral districts and also from all-union public organizations (Amended Article 109 of the 1977 Constitution) was to make this body a true representative of all strata and shades of opinion. This body had a 'dual nature' both as a state body and as a popular organization.

The amendments to Article 111 made the Supreme Soviet of the USSR a permanent legislative, administrative and control body. The same article vested the two chambers of the Supreme Soviet with equal powers. This provision was meant to give equal protection to the interests of the Union republics at the Centre.

Another important feature of the Constitutional amendment was the introduction of the principle of accountability. According to Article 117 the Congress of People's Deputies would be the chief arbiter in the
event of disagreement between the two Houses of the Supreme Soviet. According to Article 113 (clause 18) the Supreme Soviet would have the right to revoke Decrees and decisions of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and decisions and directions of the Council of Ministers of the USSR. Thus we notice that some kind of a system of checks and balances was being introduced in the USSR.

Another important feature of the democratization aspect of the Constitutional amendments was the widening of the scope of the 'Right to initiate legislation in the USSR' (Article 114). This right was earlier (unamended Article 113 of the 1977 Constitution) vested in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Public Organisations, Supreme Court and the Procurator General of the USSR. The scope was extended (Article 114) by vesting this right in the Congress of People's Deputies, the Constitutional Inspection Committee of the USSR, the Committee of Public Inspection of the USSR and in the Academy of Science of the USSR.

Perhaps, the most notable feature of the Constitutional amendments was the creation of Constitutional
Inspection Committee of the USSR and the Public Inspection Committee of the USSR (Article 125). The Constitutional Inspection Committee according to Article 125, would be elected by the Congress of People's Deputies from among specialists in politics and law. It was an independent body, and was answerable only to constitution of the USSR. Article 125 vested this body with the responsibility that the laws passed by the State bodies were in conformity with the Constitution of the USSR (Article 125, Clause 2). In case of violation of the Constitution of the USSR by the laws made by state bodies, the Constitutional Inspection Committee was authorized to direct that body to correct that violation which contradicted the Constitution or law of the USSR (Article 125, Clause 4). The creation of the Constitutional Inspection Committee had its parallel in the 'workers' and Peasants' Inspection Committee (Rabkrin) created in the 1920s. Gorbachev's intention to create this body was meant to evolve a rule-of-law state in the USSR.

The new electoral system approved by the same session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR created multi-candidate constituencies and also stipulated that one-third of the people's deputies would be elected from
public and mass organizations. The latter provision provided an opportunity to different classes and social strata to realize their aspirations and paved the way for development of pluralism in the Soviet society.

Along with political reforms radical restructuring of the Soviet economy was also taking place. The economic reforms being introduced directly related to the change in production relations. New forms of property were being introduced in the Soviet economy. The first major decision in this direction was taken by the Plenary Meeting of the CPSU in March 1989. This meeting was specially convened to discuss the agrarian policy. At this meeting Gorbachev suggested the turning of "collective farms into cooperatives" and the introduction of lease system in land and to allow the farmers to own property in land. 62

In June 1988 the Supreme Soviet of the USSR adopted a 'Law on the Cooperatives'. This law guaranteed the citizens, the right to join and withdraw from the

co-operatives on a voluntary basis, it also guaranteed to the co-operatives, the right to collective-self-management and independence of the co-operative in decision making. 63 This law represented a consistent market oriented approach. 64 Earlier in June 1987, a 'Law on State Enterprises' was adopted by the Supreme Soviet. 65 The most important element of this law concerned self-management. Enterprise directors and managers would also elect a work council that would approve the enterprise's plans.

An important milestone in diversifying the forms of property was the 'Law on Property' adopted in 1989-90. This law de-statified the ownership of property in the USSR. This law allowed joint ventures, small family business, leasing in of land by small groups from collective and state farms, the leasing in of enterprises by small group of workers and the co-operatives, as an alternative to state property. Therefore, this

63 Izvestia, 7 June 1988.


65 Pravda, 1 July 1987.
law inter-mingled socialist and capitalist forms of property.

The changes that were taking place in the form of property and system of economic management essentially changed the relations of production in the USSR. That in fact meant that the New Edition of the CPSU Programme adopted by the 27th Congress of the CPSU in 1986 was gradually becoming redundant and losing its validity. New political groups and movements had emerged in 1989 and the CPSU was losing its monopoly of power. Against this background the 28th Congress of CPSU was held in July 1990.

THE 28TH CONGRESS OF THE CPSU AND THE NEW DRAFT PROGRAMME: FROM DEVELOPING SOCIALISM TO PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

The Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party published a Draft Platform in February 1990. The title of this platform was "Towards Humane, Democratic Socialism".66 This draft document was not only a prelude

66 Ibid., 13 February 1990.
to the forthcoming Congress but was intended "to be, after approval by the Congress and until the elaboration of the party's new programme a principled basis for the work of Communists and a system of political guidelines in the transitional period".  

This document, therefore, suggested that the earlier Programme was no longer valid and that it would serve the purpose of a programme until the new programme is prepared. The platform accepted in the introduction that the Soviet Union was marked by 'instability' and 'confusion' and the society had reached a point "when the previous system of economic management and government is not operating to a considerable extent, while new mechanisms, have not yet started to work at full capacity". In other words, it meant that the Soviet society was in a state of flux. This document denounced state hegemony in public life, and criticized a primitive view of socialist ownership, and a disregard for commodity-money relations. It advocated plan-market

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67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
oriented economic structures with diverse forms of property, including private ownership of the means of production and a full fledged market economy.  

In the political sphere, this document dropped the concept of the state of the whole people and replaced it with concept of 'law-governed-state of the Whole People', which has no room for dictatorship of any class, and even less so far the power of management bureaucracy".  

It is interesting to note here that this document tacitly accepted that the state of the whole people was not a state observing the rule-of-law and also by implication it was a dictatorship of the bureaucratic and managerial class over the people. It recognized the existence of other political groups and movements and also recognized their right to contest elections on the lines of a modern parliamentary democracy. It denied the Communist Party its hitherto existing 'claim of monopoly', in the Soviet political system and advocated political

70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
pluralism. In the sphere of state institutions it advocated the principle of separation of powers between the three wings of government, i.e., the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. It made the managerial apparatus accountable to the representative bodies and the public. The draft platform emphasized the need for the adoption of a new constitution in the light of above mentioned changes in the Soviet political system.

The draft platform completely reversed the earlier notions about a Communist Party. It perceived the CPSU as a Party of Socialist Choice, 73 i.e., some kind of a social democratic party. The Communist Party was denied the role of a state party. It said: "The party does not assume state powers", 74 and denied it the monopoly position in the Soviet system by recommending the amendment of Article 6 of the Constitution. It recognized the trade unions as independent public organizations, 75 free from Party control. The Communist Parties of the

73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
republics were freed from the tutelage of the central bodies of the CPSU and it emphasized the need for a radical rethinking on the principle of democratic centralism.

THE DRAFT CPSU PROGRAMME

The CPSU Platform of February 1990, which was also to serve as some kind of a party programme until the new programme was adopted set the tone and tenor of the 28th Congress of the CPSU, Gorbachev asked the Congress "to consider the present CPSU Programme no longer valid". And Gorbachev requested the Congress to appoint a Commission to draft the new Programme since the society was in a state of flux. The Congress in its resolution approved "the radical renovation of its programme". The need for new programme, according to Gorbachev, arose because "we are in a transitional period, in which the dismantling of the old system - and still less the building of the new one - has not yet been completed".


77 Ibid., p. 102.

78 Ibid., p. 9.
The Draft CPSU Programme was published in August 1991, immediately following the 28th Congress. A very brief and precise document comparable to the 1919 programme, it defined, "Socialism, Democracy, Progress", as its main objectives. It completely dropped references to the dictatorship of the proletariat while mentioning the 1919 Bolshevik Programme. It denounced the omnipotence of the party-state bureaucracy of the Stalinist period. The Soviet state during that period was characterized as "supercentralized bureaucratic".79

According to the Draft Programme the notable feature of the evolution of Soviet state during Stalin's time was "the fusion of the party apparatus with the strictness of power and administration", and the transformation of the Communist Party into a "tool of the super-centralised bureaucratic administration".80 The programme, therefore, very clearly and forthrightly explained the nature of the Soviet state as a highly centralized bureaucratic state. The draft programme also criticized

79 Pravda, 8 August 1991.
80 Ibid.
the 1961 programme for its failure to take note of the causes and nature of the deformations of the Soviet system. The gross miscalculations of the 1961 programme allowed the continuation of 'Authoritarian Bureaucratic system'.\textsuperscript{81} This kind of a state system proved to be a brake on the democratization process, ushered in during the post-20th Congress period. This document described the period from the 28th Congress onwards as a phase of transition. The main features of this period according to the draft programme were: (a) transformation of ownership relations; (b) the transition from a super centralized state to a union based on self-determination and voluntary association of peoples, and (c) the reform of the political system on democratic principles.\textsuperscript{82}

\textbf{The Perspectives of the Draft Programme}

\textbf{(i) The Change in Forms of Ownership of Property and Relations of Production}

The economic goals of the programme were the formation of a mixed economy, i.e., the formation of a

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
regulated market economy with diversified forms of ownership of means of production in industry and agriculture. In industry, the programme identified "the state, collective and private, joint stock and cooperative" as forms of ownership and in agriculture, "state, collective and private farming and leasing with the right of inheritance" as the various types of ownership of the means of production. In this kind of an economy, free prices, costs, profit and interest would play a dominant role. These factors, the programme envisaged, would help "overcoming the crisis in the economy and in making the transition to the market". Mikhail Gorbachev also proclaimed in his Report on the 28th Congress that the relations of production were changing in the USSR. He noted: "...production relations that caused the alienation of the working people from property and from the results of their work are being dismantled and conditions are being created for free competition". Gorbachev described the evolving model of the Soviet

83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 28th Congress of the CPSU, n. 76, p. 6.
economy as a 'multi-sectoral' having a 'modern market infrastructure'. Supply and demand, interest rates and profit and free prices would play a crucial role in the evolution of this model, Gorbachev explained to the Congress.

(ii) The Evolution of Parliamentary Democracy

Logically, flowing from the evolution of market economy and the changing production relations in the USSR, were drawn the conclusions about nature of Soviet political system. Gorbachev described the features of the Soviet state in his report to the 28th Congress as a genuine democracy, with free elections, a multi-party system and human rights. The policy statement of the 28th Congress of CPSU worded as "Towards a Humane Democratic Socialism", proclaimed the predominance of civil society over the state and "the consolidation of the law-based state in which the dictatorship of any class, political party, grouping or the managerial bureaucracy is ruled out". 87

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid., p. 86.
The draft programme incorporated this formulation of the 28th Congress. It described the establishment of parliamentary democracy based on multi-party system and political pluralism and the separation of powers. The Soviet state was no longer defined as the state of the whole people. There was not even a single reference to this concept in the whole programme. The focus of the programme was on the 'law-governed-state', which recognized the existence of various political parties and movements. The programme stated that a 'rule of law state' and a "civil society, political and ideological pluralism, the possibility of expressing the interests of different social groups", 88 were the political foundations of humane, democratic, socialism.

The foregoing analysis of the draft programme clearly suggests that the Soviet state was in the process of evolving into a parliamentary democracy with all the features of a state in a modern capitalist society. The evolution and changing nature of the Soviet political system was also reflected in the changing character and

88 Pravda, 8 August 1991.
role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Draft Programme took note of this aspect as well.

The resolutions of the 28th Congress of the CPSU envisaged a parliamentary role for the Communist Party and ended its monopoly in the Soviet society. The Congress also renounced the nomenclatura approach in the personnel work of the party. The principle of democratic centralism was rejected and the democratic principles were emphasized. The draft programme also announced that "the aims of democratisation would be promoted by political debates, freedom to unite around party platforms and guarantee of minority rights". The right of the Party members to openly express their position on any question of party life and of society and the right to believe was recognized in the programme. The republican parties, according to the programme, would enjoy autonomy from the centre and would have the right to "independently determine their operating tactics in a specific situation". Thus, the party which came into being as an organization of professional revolutionaries,

89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
in the form of RSDLP in 1903, with democratic centralism as its organizational principle, representing the interests of a particular class (Proletariat) transformed itself in 1991 into a parliamentary party. The party which assumed the vanguard role in 1903 to organize the working class for making a revolution, and later on after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, assumed the guiding role of the dictatorship of the Proletariat, after seventy four years transformed Soviet Union into a bourgeois parliamentary democracy.

After ten days of the publication of the Draft Programme a coup took place in the USSR and the unfolding circumstances after the coup finally led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Though the programme remained only in a draft form, yet the tasks it envisaged were logically completed by the events in December 1991. These events also consigned the draft of the Programme to the museum of Soviet history.