DISJUNCTION TO COMMONWEALTH

CHAPTER V
In this chapter we bring our analysis to a conclusion. This is only appropriate as 1991 was a culmination of the process of political change of the preceding six years. Concomitantly, our analysis of these years with the help of the framework evolved in the first chapter, must also lend itself to a conclusion with the demise of the USSR. As in the previous chapters, the conclusions drawn from the four-fold analysis of the preceding years forms the basis for a similar analysis of 1991. In the process, we'll draw conclusions on four vital issues that influenced political change in the USSR between 1985 and 1991. Our conclusions will concern the dilemma of continuity versus change, the relation between economics and politics, the multiplicity of distinct processes and the gap between "theory" and practice in the former USSR.

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The analysis of 1991 as a period of political change has yet another connection with the conclusions of our study. The demise of the USSR was the demise of a nation-state, or to be more precise, a multinational state. Any demise of a nation-state necessarily means the demise or collapse of its constitution, its political structures, its economic system, its societal fabric etc. These can never be analyzed in isolation for the root of the problem always lies in its past. In the case of the former USSR it means the logical culmination of the process of change.\(^2\) In this sense too, our analysis must necessarily end with the demise of the USSR.

Having said this, it is also necessary to point out that it is neither the mandate of this study nor of the argument contained in this chapter to reveal any "truths" about the "coup" of August 1991 or the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). These have been analysed in as much as they relate to the process of political change discussed so far.

We'll begin then with the dilemma of continuity versus change.

\(^2\) A logical culmination does not necessarily imply an \textit{inevitable} one, and does \textit{not} in this case.
CONTINUITY vs CHANGE

The most evident symptom of the fatal disease that had struck the Soviet political system was the almost perpetual need to amend the constitution. This also manifested itself in the terrific indecision and delay over the drafting of a new union treaty, let alone its acceptance, in 1991. The new union treaty as it finally stood on 4 November 1991, came after more than a year of talks and several drafts. Within that period, the process had got permanently impaired by the all-union referendum and the coup of August 1991. Now, it is only elementary that a country which was fast losing its grip on its constituents must evolve a constitution that can bind it together, as soon as possible. However, given the dilemma of continuity and change over the last six years, this wasn't possible.

Structural Changes

Perestroika brought a plethora of structural changes. The process was begun by Gorbachev with his pronouncements on inner party democracy and renewal at the January plenum of the central committee in 1987. This culminated in the 19th Party Conference and manifested as an "amendment" to
the constitution in 1988. Similarly, the 1961 party programme was again only "amended" in 1988. Here was born the first structural dilemma of continuity versus change.

The "amendments" were so far-reaching in their consequences that they virtually amounted to a completely new constitution and party programme. It was however, felt necessary to maintain a veneer of continuity while completely changing the content of the constitution and party programme. As was explained in chapter II, Gorbachev was trying to be cautious and "constitutional". Be that as it may, by the time 1991 arrived there had been innumerable amendments to the constitutional structures, even as it stood in 1988. In 1991, after the coup, once again the constitution was amended to create three new structures instead of the existing one. The Congress of People's Deputies (CPD) session of September 1991 virtually dissolved itself to give way to a new State Council, a bicameral Supreme Soviet and an Inter-Republican Economic Committee (IEC) whose functions were initially to be carried out by an

3. 2-6 September 1991, fifth extraordinary session of the CPD. For details of the document adopted by the Congress and the Ten plus One statement see, Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB), (Reading, England: BBC Monitoring Service), 5 September 1991, SU/1169, i. For details after adoption, see SWB, 6 September 1991, SU/1170, i.

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interim Committee for the Management of the National Economy. All this, of course, happened while the negotiations for drafting a new union treaty were still going on.

The point is that none of the amendments to the constitution proved durable. 4 Moreover, the multiplicity of institutions it created and destroyed frequently left it with no viable means of being preserved. In the Soviet Union of the pre-Gorbachev days the role of the constitution's viability was played by Marxist-Leninist ideology. Whether written or un-written, any constitution that hopes to survive the test of time must have a firm philosophical foundation. In the pre-Gorbachev days though this was provided by Marxism-Leninism, the Russian constitution of 1918 was amended to form the first Soviet constitution in 1924, then again in 1936 and finally in 1977. 5 However, no previous constitution had either been amended so often nor created and destroyed so many new structures. The fact was

4. Except, perhaps, for the CPD itself, which met 5 times before the coup and had the exclusive right to amend the constitution. In the new dispensation, this was taken up by the new bicameral SS.

5. For a Soviet jurist's point of view, see Boris Topornin, The New Constitution of the USSR (Moscow, 1987).
that Gorbachev and the CPSU were not very clear about their ideological position, except that socialism was to be the creed of the Soviet Union, even though they debunked all "prescriptions" of socialism.  

**Ideological Vacillation**

It is thus, not surprising that it took Gorbachev up to July 1991 to even admit that the ideological basis for the new union treaty had to be more than strictly Marxist-Leninist. This is the first time that he allowed for "all the riches of our and the worlds socialist and democratic thought" to be "included in our ideological arsenal". Indeed, the main purpose of this central committee meeting was to decide on a new party programme. Even then a final decision on both the party programme and the name of the CPSU was put off till later. This waxing and waning of

6. See Gorbachev's speech to the plenum of the CC on the new party programme. Full text by Tass in (SWB), 27 July 1991, SU/1135, C1/1 - C1/7.

7. Emphasis added. For a text of the draft CPSU programme as published by Pravda, 8 August 1991, first edn., see, SWB, 9 August 1991, SU/1146, C1/1-C1/7. Quote from C1/7. In fact, Gorbachev is explicit, suggesting that socialism so far had proved itself to be "bankrupt" and "socialism and the market being indivisible in essence" were not really "incompatible, as thought earlier"; ibid, C1/2.
CPSU's ideological face robbed the draft union treaty, agreed to just the day before the central committee plenum, of a firm philosophical foundation.

The CPSU did not have a well-defined ideological orientation towards the reforms needed by the Soviet Union. First acceleration then perestroika filled the ideological vaccum. In the absence of an ideology that could rally forces under its banner, it was perestroika that gathered forces around. However, no constitution can have "restructuring" as its tenet, as the constitution must have and lend stability to the system. Perestroika could at best be the means to one, but it ended up being an end in itself. The issue in the Soviet Union was further complicated by its multi-national character. The growth in separatist movements further weakened the existing constitutional mechanisms.

This was particularly evident in 1991 as various republics kept boycotting talks on a new union treaty at different times. A viable constitution wasn't possible without a viable treaty. And without a viable constitution, no perestroika was really possible. The net result was chaos.

Recently we had the experience, I would say the bitter experience, of a war of laws, and a lack of co-ordination in the actions of the authorities at
various levels. All this was having and had, an extremely negative effect on all spheres of society's life, on the speeds of transformation, on the whole policy of perestroika. I am convinced that with the conclusion of the treaty the main reasons which led to such an abnormal situation will be eliminated. 8

In the same breath Gorbachev had also made a direct reference to the dilemma of continuity and change. "The treaty presupposes the transformation of the union on the basis of continuity and renewal." 9 The question was, continuity and renewal of what? Gorbachev's answer was quite illuminating. According to him there was continuity in preserving the union. Renewal came in the "new genuinely voluntary union of sovereign states" and this was the "sense of the reform of our statehood". 10

Gorbachev had a similar stand on another vital issue closely connected to this - the abolition of Ar. 6 of the constitution of 1977. Dismissing the move as a threat to the CPSU, he remained sanguine because "...there was no such special entry on the leading role of the party in the first

9. ibid, B/1.
10. ibid

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Soviet constitution adopted under Lenin". And he added for good measure, "Even in the 1936 [Stalin] constitution this subject was touched on only in regard to the right of associations of citizens". This was Gorbachev's response just two days after Lithuania abolished Ar. 6 from its constitution in December 1989. This was a pathetic attempt at establishing the credentials of continuity, for Gorbachev was only well aware (as Shevardnadze admitted at the 28th Party Congress, later) of the developments till then in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and Poland. Once again, the more USSR changed, the more Gorbachev tried to establish some continuity.

Yeltsin, the Rival

There was one other vital development that decisively tilts the balance in favour of change, rather than continuity being the propensity of the Soviet system. Quite contrary to the Russian culture given to authoritarianism, Gorbachev never really behaved like on autocrat. In fact, he encouraged the emergence of Yeltsin as a political rival.


12. ibid
This was a development that even Gorbachev couldn't have claimed was truly Leninist. Never in the Soviet past has any general secretary or president ever allowed a rival to come up. However, "Gorbachev studiously avoided electioneering for the official candidate of the Party, Nikolai Ryzhkov."\textsuperscript{13}\footnote{Zafar Imam, "How and Why the Soviet Union Disintegrated", \textit{International Studies} (New Delhi), vol.29, no.4, (1992), p.384.} Considering that in 1990, upon getting elected to the post of president he had promised to keep his office above party affiliations, this was not surprising. However, he could have certainly nipped Yeltsin in the bud at the 1987 October plenum of the central committee, instead of rewarding him by continuing to keep Yeltsin at an equivalent minister's post.

By 1991, even before the coup, Yeltsin had begun to flex his newly acquired political muscle of a people's mandate. He acquired three vital ingredients for his political success. One was power, that came to him the more Gorbachev favoured decentralization, even when he was first secretary in the Moscow city party. The second was legitimacy, as he had been elected by the people - an ingredient Gorbachev sorely lacked despite his being a staunch believer and supporter of democracy and
accountability. The third was a constituency, in the form of the most powerful and largest of Soviet republics. This was an ingredient that Gorbachev was fast losing. After the coup, Yeltsin had indisputably donned the mantle of the leader of Russia, rivalling Gorbachev's stature effectively.¹⁴ Even before the coup, Gorbachev had invited Yeltsin to attend the official ceremony to meet president Bush. Yeltsin had then declined the offer, further underlining the growth in his stature. He however, did explain that considering all nine republics had taken part in the Novo-Ogarevo process, it wouldn't be fair if just he and Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan were invited and not the others.¹⁵

Yeltsin himself was keenly aware of his own growing importance. He was the only man in Soviet history to survive

¹⁴. In fact, two opinion polls conducted by Mneniye, an independent service, showed that Yeltsin was for more popular than Gorbachev. All-Union Radio, Mayak reported on 2 November 1991 that 61% would vote for Yeltsin as President of the USSR as opposed to 31% for Gorbachev. And while 38% would vote against Gorbachev, only 17% would vote against Yeltsin. The poll for Moscow was even more overwhelmingly in support of Yeltsin. In, SWB, 5 November 1991, SU/1221, B/1 and SWB, 8 November 1991, SU/1224, B/7 respectively.

a no confidence motion as president. He immediately pressed for direct elections to the post of president of Russia and won the election. He had achieved all this before the coup itself. At the same time he had also ensured the development of sovereign Russian institutions and severed all connections of the CPSU with the Russian state. He was, as he admitted, readying himself for transformation and carried that message to the masses while campaigning for his direct election as president:

The result of the work of the Supreme Soviet and Government of Russia over the year is not just that they were able to hold their ground and stand firm; the main thing is that great undertakings have been created for the long term. A substantial legal base has been created for transformation already for the implementation of concrete measures.

Any doubts regarding what he meant were laid to rest when Bush visited Moscow on 30 July 1991. Commenting on his talks with president Bush, Yeltsin said:

16. Actually, the deputies at the RSFSR, CPD session on 2 April 1991 voted not to put the matter on the agenda. In the same meeting, the deputies orally decided to drop the idea of voting to express their dissatisfaction with Gorbachev. Yeltsin had won with 767 votes in favour and 121 against. See Tass report in SWB, 3 April 1991, SU/1036, i.

17. As quoted in Imam, n.13, p.390. Yeltsin said this on 1 June 1991 on his campaign trail.
... our views - the USA's and Russia's - coincide with regard to the republics - they must be given the opportunity to acquire independence and even to secede from the union. That is what is proposed. Unfortunately President Gorbachev has a different opinion. Well, perhaps this will change after our discussions yesterday.18

The important point is not to note what seemed to be Yeltsin's agenda even before the coup, which happened 20 days later, but that Yeltsin was Russia's first directly elected president. He had the mandate for his agenda.19 Gorbachev, in comparison, depended on a loose consensus that emerged from an all-union referendum on preserving the union, which was held in March 1991, a full three months before Yeltsin's direct election.

Therefore, the triumvirate of rapid structural changes in the political system, the lack of a well-defined ideological and philosophical base for reform and renewal and the emergence of a rival centre of power clearly indicated that Soviet institutions of the pre-Gorbachev days were not in themselves immutable and resistant to change, as

18. SWB, n.15, C1/15.

19. Even before his direct election in June, Yeltsin openly derided Marxist-Leninist dogma, advocating a market economy instead. See his speech to the RSFSR, CPD, relayed by Russia's Radio in SWB, 1 April 1991, SU/1034, C2/1 - C2/12.
put forward in the totalitarian and political culture approaches.\textsuperscript{20} Indeed, they were immutable so long as the CPSU leadership wanted to preserve them. The monopoly of the party over state power was a double edged sword. It was this monopoly that had made it easy for Soviet institutions to be changed so often. It was a clear break from past practice not to specify the ideological space for reform before-hand, letting it evolve instead.\textsuperscript{21} The rise of Yeltsin as a rival centre of power is proof of the plurality of Russian and Soviet political culture. Autocracy and ideology were no pillars of strength that "history and culture would conspire against" to break the back of the Union.\textsuperscript{22} They were always there, but never allowed to destroy the political union forged by the power of the CPSU.

This leads us directly to one of the most hotly debated problems of political change in the Soviet Union. The

\textsuperscript{20} For these views see Stephen White, Political Culture and Soviet Politics (London, 1979) and Z. Brzezinski, The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the 20th Century (London, 1989).

\textsuperscript{21} For an elaboration on this point and its impact on the future of the CPSU, see R.R. Sharma, "Future of CPSU", World Focus (New Delhi), vol.12, nos.9-10, September-October 1991, pp.15-17.

\textsuperscript{22} Brzezinski, n.20, pp.99-100.
question is, was change a result of economic factors, motivated by economic compulsions, or was it a result of a new political leadership? As suggested in the previous section, the conclusion of this thesis is overwhelmingly the latter. We'll now turn our attention to this.

ECONOMICS AND POLITICS

The major contention of this thesis is that the Soviet economy was not responsible for either the disintegration of the USSR or for compelling the Soviet Union to change politically. At best it provided a pressure point for political change. In fact, it is the economy of the Soviet Union that was responsible for keeping the Union, till the USSR existed, and for forging a commonwealth after its disunion.

1991 saw the culmination of a peculiar relationship between Soviet politics and economics. The Soviet economic situation was grave in 1985. In 1991, it had virtually
collapsed. The collapse of the economy was not because the problems faced by the economy were unsolvable. Indeed, the economic situation got out of hand precisely because of the multiplicity of solutions available. The new institution of the CPD was an unwieldy instrument of decision-making. Its offspring, the Supreme Soviet, and the CPSU lacked a consensus on the ideological orientation of reform. However, there was always a consensus on support for perestroika. The differences were not economic, but political.

Multiple Economic Solutions

The USSR entered 1991 without a budget. Everyone was agreed that the situation was grave, yet, like in 1989 and 1990, it took a long while to decide on a solution. The


24. Soviet accounts of the economic crisis began with Prime Minister V. Pavlov's report to the SS of the USSR on an "anti-crisis" programme to manage the economy. Moscow home service report in SWB, 23 April 1991, SU/1053, ii. Then again on 2 July Pavlov painted a bleak picture of the results of the first six months of 1991; industrial production was down by 6% and dropping, trade turnover declined twice as much; the implementation of an "anti-crisis" programme was considered urgent at this meeting of prominent economists, republican heads and Gorbachev. "State Council Meeting", SWB, 18 September 1991, SU/1180, C1.
character of the economic problem had also acquired a new dimension. Even though a modified programme for economic reform was adopted in October 1990, which sought to balance the versions of Shatalin and Ryzhkov, by December this was already inadequate. As a new treaty and a new constitution were being debated, the need for a new economic union was beginning to assert itself. After the March referendum and subsequent events, attention was now being given to strengthen the economic base for a Union. Once again there were several plans when matters came up to the newly constituted State Council, at a session in September 1991.25 Presidents of ten republics attended. Out of the three plans for an economic union put forward by Shatalin, Russian Economics Minister Yevgni Saburov and Grigory Yavlinsky, then a deputy chairperson of the IEC, it was Yavlinsky's plan that was adopted. This was modelled on the American federal reserve system.

However, the consensus didn't even last till November 1991. On 6 November the Ukraine and Moldova agreed to sign the

Treaty on Economic Community, that left just Azerbaijan and Georgia out. On 14 November, however, when the IEC was endorsed, the Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia and Uzbekistan did not attend. The functioning of the IEC, which had been entrusted with the task of managing the economy after the coup of 1991, was thus impaired by the lack of consensus. To make matters worse, in a compromise agreement on 30 November 1991 control over the union budget was shared between Yeltsin and Gorbachev. This added further confusion. A strong impediment in sticking to a specific plan of economic union was the impending referendum in the Ukraine.

Similarly, in the pre-coup days of 1991, nine republics approved of Gorbachev's version of the "anti-crisis" programme of economic recovery put forward by Soviet Prime Minister, V. Pavlov. The Gorbachev solution of 8 July 1991 was an amalgamation of Pavlov's plan and Yavlinsky's "grand bargain" proposal advocating a massive influx of western

26. In fact, Ukraine had a stormy parliamentary session before deciding to vote in favour the economic treaty, membership to which was not contingent on signing the union treaty. Radio Kiev report in SWB, 7 November 1991, SU/1223, i.

27. 30 November 1991, Tass report of their meeting where Russia agreed to bear responsibility for expenditure under the union budget. See for details, "USSR Budget Crisis", SWB, 2 December 1991, SU/1244, C1.
economic assistance. When the Interim Economic Committee came into being after the coup even this plan fell by the wayside.

So, virtually, from December 1989 to November 1991 there were no less than ten blueprints for the future direction of the economy; from Ryzhkov's plan of December 1989 to Yavlinsky's plan modelled on the American federal reserve system, the country had come a long way. Pavlov had warned of impending economic collapse in a conference attended by representatives of all 15 republics and Gorbachev, on 2 July 1991. By 2 August 1991, at an expanded session of the Presidium of the USSR Cabinet of Ministers, Pavlov was given 10 days to prepare a wide range of urgent measures to stabilize the situation in the sphere of finance and money supply; this was the situation a week before the coup.

**Ideology and Populism**

At least from 1989, or after the 19th Party Conference in 1988, the ideological constraint on reform was no longer relevant. At the time when the Law of State Enterprises was

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introduced in 1987 without price reforms, ideological constraints was the biggest hurdle. However, with the 19th Party Conference this too had changed. In an interview to Rabochaya Tribuna on 24 April 1990, Gorbachev's economic aide, N.Ya. Petrakov repeated Gorbachev's determination to "solve the problem of building market relations in the economy without any fears on inhibitions. Ideological barriers have been demolished in this sense, but how should the building proceed?" The problem was complicated by "politicians who are playing on the masses' moods." This explained the plethora of economic evaluations and the inordinate delay in forging a consensus on the way forward. The USSR, in fact, had begun to witness a pilgrimage of Western economists whose advice coincided with Soviet intentions, leaving no shortage of people with theories. However, "the practical side is much more acute: where will the path we are taking lead us?"


31. ibid

32. ibid, Cl/5.

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The interview is quite comprehensive and addresses itself to a number of propositions concerning the transition to a market economy; the term then being used was market relations and forms of ownership. On the question of perestroika not having a "trustworthy theory about the transitional period, Petrakov was categorical:

I do not know of a single country which extricated from a crisis by implementing some strictly scientific theory. ...Keynes's theory...emerged when the great depression set in... however, the Roosevelt administration also groped to find its way step by step. ...[similarly] Ludwig Erhard...implemented the famous West German mark reform, ...[and] Guido Carli in Italy...strengthen[ed] the lire. ...[not to mention] a very interesting reform of the yen in 1948. In this context I perceive no great danger in the fact that we lack a sophisticated theory of our economy's perestroika, a plan of measures, as it might be said in the old parlance. But we do have definite, perfectly precise and worked-out principles and idea.33

Thus, the new hurdle for economic reform was neither ideology nor theory, neither an entrenched Stalinist bureaucracy nor the ignorance of complex problem solving economics. The new hurdle was the politician playing up to

33. ibid
the "masses' mood". In such a situation, the CPD was extremely inclement for decision-making. The various structures that emerged from it from 1989 to 1991 didn't last long enough for implementing hard decisions. Gorbachev however, defended the charge that the parliament had been reduced to a debating club: "When I am sometimes accused of giving the country somewhat of the odour of a debating club, I want to say this: We are still learning democracy, we're all learning. We're still forming our political culture. We're still trying to master all the mechanisms of democracy".

To put it differently, the economics of reform, never in doubt, were always subject to the politics of reform. The politics of reform went through two distinct phases; the ideological and the populist. The most interesting development in this regard was the interpretation given to reconcile Leninism with the market. Lenin alone stood


36. SWB, n.6, and n.7.
through ideological ferment, while all those who succeeded him were discarded. The anti-Stalinist drive gave a call to return socialism to its rightful place. Yuri Afanasyev, historian and then member of the Supreme Soviet was unequivocal in 1990:

Here I must protest the formula, widespread even among supporters of perestroika, that we can simply return to Lenin, repent, receive his blessings, and move onward. That is a foolish way of thinking, more of a religious idea than a political-historical one. We must return to the basic principles of Lenin's socialism - democracy, humanism, market economics [a reference to Lenin's NEP], civil peace, and the rest.37

Of course, that meant moving forward "with Lenin's help, but we will have to find our own solution to our problems. And we still must work out a full conception of socialism ... of building socialism anew."38 And so Marx, Lenin and the market were reconciled conceptually, though in practice this necessarily meant lip-service to Lenin. We shall come to this in the last section of this chapter.

Our principal point concerning the relationship of economics and politics to the process of political change can now be answered. If economic reform was hardly

38. ibid
implemented, given the piece-meal efforts upto 1986, the ill-conceived, though radical efforts upto 1988 and the sheer delay in choosing a path upto 1991, then what was responsible for change in the USSR between 1985 and 1991? Surely, not economics; at least not the "benefits" of economic reform, as there were very few. Nor was it disillusionment with economic reforms, as they were hardly tried out. The answer obviously comes from outside the purely economic realm. The massive increase in consumer demand was not so much because of an "increase" in demand, as it was because of a severe problem of shortages, or a depression in supply.39

The most striking proof of the source of political change lying in a non-economic realm is the miners' strike that plagued the USSR since 1989. What began as a demand for better wages, better living conditions and so on, soon began to take political overtones. In 1989 the strikes were crippling. By 1990 the strikes had clearly become an instrument for articulating political demands. There were only a few warning strikes that year. In 1991 the strikes

39. Right upto the point when the Soviet Union ceased to exist, shortages kept plaguing the economy. See, for instance Tass on the "bread crisis", in Moscow in SWB, 5 November 1992, SU/1221, i.
had been honed into a political movement. They were also the longest in perestroika's history. What began in March ended only in May 1991. A key element in ending the strike had been Yeltsin's order of 1 May 1991 transferring all coal mines in the Russian Federation from central Soviet to Russian Federation government control. In fact, when the Kuzbass miners of Siberia struck work in March their demands were purely political. It included the dissolution of the CPD and Gorbachev's resignation apart from transfer of control to the Russian Federation. The strike, that had spread to the Donbass region of the Ukraine, soon began to echo the Kuzbass miners. These demands crippled the economy even further and were quite irresolvable as the demands were irredeemable.

This must have obviously had a bearing on the Novo-Ogarevo process, where nine republics agreed to an all-union


treaty in their discussions with Gorbachev. The miners' demands could only be met after that. In fact, Yeltsin assured the miners that the transfer had been made a part of the pact.42 The growth in the political character of the miners' strike was in large part due to the success of the Solidarity in Poland, no doubt. However, the point is that the economics of the strikes were never a problem. In fact, as we saw in chapter IV, in 1989 the strike had evoked a sympathetic response from Gorbachev and had been redressed immediately. However, by the time it spread to the Donbass in the Ukraine it had started voicing demands such as the abolition of Ar.6, a directly elected presidency and drawing-up of a new union treaty.

It is clear from the above that change, especially political change, was a result of "the conjunction" of, mutually dependent reforming forces from above and below",43 in the words of Lewis Coser. If we extrapolate further, we can see that the Soviet Union did not undergo a sea-change


in its politics because its economy had failed. Indeed, solutions to economic problems were always available and Andropov, in fact, had begun the task after the demise of Brezhnev. However, in Gorbachev's time economic reform had become politically unviable, initially because of ideological barriers and later because of political populism.

Glasnost and Political Change

The argument posited by several scholars on the role of glasnost in firmly establishing a civic political culture, which in turn caused the Soviet Union to collapse, is not as hot as it seems. Firstly, the effect of glasnost in terms of the growth of associations and groups that began to articulate different interests was more social than political. This is well expressed by Mary Buckley:

... although glasnost tout court did not lead to a legitimacy crisis for the USSR or result in processes of disintegration and revolution, it was nevertheless essential to them. ...Social issues also came onto agendas first because Gorbachev's commitment in 1986 to economic reform and to consideration of the "human factor" preceded his serious push in 1988 for political reform. 44

44. Mary Buckley, Redefining Russian Society and Polity (Boulder, 1993), pp.3-4.
However, it cannot be denied that "new interpretations of society prepared citizens for revaluations of the political system and contributed to pressures for them". In the face of this it is hard to claim that political change was a direct result of the policy of glasnost introduced by Gorbachev, as a repressed people had finally found their voice.

Secondly, the pedigree of glasnost is not limited to 1985 and Gorbachev. Thirdly, perestroika was also a "revolution from above", in the sense that Gorbachev and the leadership of the CPSU were certainly responsible for some of the initiatives in encouraging political change. One specific instance was the January 1987 plenum of the central committee, discussed in chapter III, when electoral reform entered the party agenda for the first time. This process soon blossomed into the 19th Party Conference, which as A.K. Damodaran remarked, was "unusual to be convened at all." He was addressing a day long seminar organized at the

45. ibid, p.1.
47. On its significance, see Sharma, n.21, pp.15-16. for an elaboration see chapter III of this thesis.
In fact, writing after the coup, Gorbachev himself defends the charge that the 19th Party Conference is where perestroika had gone wrong. However, he admits that the Conference "made it [perestroika] irreversible". Unfortunately, what had happened by then was radical economic reform but without price reform, and promises of profound political reform without ideological renewal. With the irreversibility of these processes the lopsided relationship between Soviet economics and politics became a permanent feature of the years of perestroika. Indeed, by 1988 glasnost had lived through its golden age. After that

48. Following the coup, there was intense activity on the campus of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, long associated with Marxist scholarship and a bedrock of communist students politics in India. Politiques and Periyar Discussion Forum (its members belong to Periyar hostel in the JNU) organised a very well attended day long seminar at the University's auditorium. Unfortunately, no record of the presentations made exists, save for some vital notes taken down by students, including myself. The participants were Girilal Jain, Bhabani Sen Gupta, S. Nihal Singh, A.K. Damodaran, Zafar Imam, Sudipto Kaviraj, G.P. Deshpande and Namwar Singh. The last three speakers spoke on the theme, "Crisis in Socialism and its Future".

it became a part of the proceedings of the CPD and a part of Soviet society.

However, political change was not the hand-maiden of glasnost. It was much more the result of a complex of distinct processes that, through their simultaneous occurrence, left an abiding imprint on the Soviet system. We shall now turn our attention to this aspect.

MULTIPLE, DISTINCT PROCESSES

Political change is a much broader canvas than economic reform. While economic reform can be gauged by its results, it is very difficult to measure or quantify political change. However, its simplest manifestation is the shifting locus of power. In the Soviet Union of 1991, power had not only shifted from the centre to the republics, but one of the major sources of power became the republics' competence in securing international recognition for their declarations of sovereignty. The influence of the external and internal environments on political change in the USSR was profound in 1991.

External Pressure

Consider the external environment in 1991. The Gulf War
had started and the USSR remained a silent partner throughout. The European Community (EC) was heading towards the Maastricht treaty. Under the umbrella of the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) the developed and developing countries had decided to let their trade barriers drop substantially to harvest the global economy. It is in this environment that all the republics of the USSR began to look primarily westwards. They had two goals - financial aid and recognition as a subject of international law. The former goal was pursued by Gorbachev at the G-7 summit, while the latter was first on the agenda for several republics during the visit of President Bush for the Moscow summit, close on the heels of the G-7 meeting. Gorbachev went a step further by hoping to integrate the USSR with the global economy. This Westward orientation of the centre and the republics opened the doors to an intimate engagement of outside powers in directing and encouraging a particular genre of political change. 50 In a situation where the Soviet

50. Gorbachev himself announced the visits of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, UK, the US Finance Minister and a similar representative from the FRG at the joint press conference following Bush's visit, on 31 July 1991. And he also asserted that "... this process will go on...". Text of Moscow home service relay in SWB, 2 August 1991, SU/1140, C1/6.
economy needed economic aid desperately, it was very
difficult for views not favoured by the donor countries to
gain currency.

At the 17th annual economic summit of the G-7 countries
the Soviet Union did not get any immediate offer of large
scale financial assistance, though it did gain a vital
foothold in entering the world economy. In the aid package
proposed at the end of the meeting, the Soviet Union, though
not given full membership, was granted a "special
association" with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the
World Bank, its European equivalent and the Organisation for
Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).51 It also
became entitled to technical economic assistance and there
were to be regular visits by G-7 finance ministers to the
Soviet Union. Although Germany was willing to give
substantial financial aid, the USA and Japan objected.52 The
US position on not approving aid was made clear later at the

51. British Prime Minister John Major unveiled the package
reported by Moscow home service. Cf. SWB, 19 July 1991,
SU/1128, Special Supplement, C1/1 - C1/2.

52. This was inferred from a series of press conferences
held on 17 July 1991. For the American position, see
Gorbachev - Bush press conference, ibid, C1/6 - C1/7
and for the Japanese, see Kyodo report on Gorbachev-
Kaifu meeting, ibid, C1/7 - C1/8.
Moscow summit. Apparently, two hastily cobbled together economic measures, namely, one on "destatization and privatization of enterprises", passed by the Supreme Soviet on 1 July 1991, and the other, a joint union-republic anti-crisis programme agreed to by the nine of republics of the Novo-Ogarevo process did not impress the Americans. The anti-crisis programme had also covered the privatization bill.

The signing of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) at the Moscow summit, soon after the G-7 meeting, was eclipsed by the political and economic significance of President Bush's visit. On 30 July, Bush announced that the Soviet Union was granted Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status. While speaking at the Moscow state Institute for International Relations, Bush spelt out what the Americans expected if the USSR wanted to fully integrate its economy with the world. These included commitment to the freedom of

53. On the reaction of G-7 leaders, see Major's reply to question in Major-Gorbachev press question-answer session, Moscow home service, 17 July 1991, ibid, C1/4. The bills themselves were hotly debated. See Lukianov defend the charge of turning USSR into a capitalist society, at press conference after SS approved the bill on 28 June 1991; SWB, 1 July 1991, SU/1112, C1/1 - C1/2. 1 July 1991, the USSR, SS adopted the two measures, Tass; SWB, 2 July 1991, SU/1113, i.
the Baltics, returning the Kurile islands to Japan, ending Soviet military aid to Cuba, cutting defence expenditure and further privatization of the economy. This was indeed a blueprint for action.

On the question of granting recognition to various republics Bush played a balancing act. The Georgians resented being referred to as a "dangerous manifestation of nationalism" and called upon the US to support genuine democracy and not communism, tyranny and showcase reforms. The Ukraine was a little more privileged. It had begun to hope for MFN status too. On recognition, its president, Leonid Kravchuk was explicit:

... the US president, the prime minister of England (as heard), the president of France and everyone, and Kohl, with whom I met as well, say: as soon as you dot your "i's" and cross your "t's" and find out locally who you are and where you are going we will immediately start normal international relations with you. This should be done and we must do it, yet using as a guideline the formula which I always talk about that - the

54. See, the text of Moscow home service's report on 30 July 1991. SWB, 1 August 1991, SU/1139, C1/4 - C1/5. Also, see, Bush-Gorbachev joint press conference, relayed by Moscow home services, SWB, n.50, C1/6.


56. ibid
Ukraine has to be a sovereign state in the union of sovereign states.\textsuperscript{57}

However, Rukh, the Ukrainian organisation for independence, was skeptical of Bush's visit: "they come here to calm us down a bit and to bring closer the signing of the union treaty which is, as it turns out, needed also by the western world".\textsuperscript{58} Kiev radio, however, reported that in an address to the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet Bush had declared that the USA would support the beginnings of democratization in the USSR and each republic; solutions to differences between the centre and the republics being the business of the USSR.\textsuperscript{59} We have already spoken about Yeltsin's talk with Bush, where the two agreed upon the republics' right to independence and secession.

Quite obviously, while the US was rewarding the USSR for its strategic acquiescence in the Gulf war by granting it MFN status, it was also pursuing its own agenda with carefully planned talks and visits. Considering that the Ukrainian referendum was still pending, this was a

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\item 58. Text of Kiev report of 1 August 1991 in \textit{SWB}, ibid, A1/6 for quote.
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politically important gesture made by the American president. These events assume a lot of significance when one tries to analyse the coup of August 1991.

Food aid from the EC, which had been frozen since the military crackdown in the Baltic republics in January 1991, was released on 5 March 1991. Following the British Prime Minister John Major's visit to the Soviet Union the same day, Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Douglas Hurd announced during his visit, the decision to open a UK consulate in Kiev, the Ukraine. After the coup, the US re-established high level contact when the US Secretary of state, James Baker met with officials of the USSR and Russia, in September 1991. This included talks with Vadim Bakatin, the new head of the KGB, after Vladimir Kryuchkov was arrested for his part in the coup. Around the same time, Georgia had been told by a US Congressional delegation that recognition to it was subject to an improvement in its human


Following the coup, financial aid pledges were also made by the EC and Japan in October 1991, and the US offered agricultural credits. Similarly, while French President, Mitterrand emphasized the importance of the centre in relations with the USSR, Germany and Austria forged ahead with consular relations with the Ukraine.

In this way both before and after the coup, the increasing involvement of outside powers, especially the wooing of the Ukraine much before its referendum, had a deep influence on the course of events in December 1991.

### Internal Pressure

The internal environment in the USSR had always thrown up some development that had affected its course of

63. Tass World Service reported on 9 September 1991 that Gamsakhurdia admitted to the delegation that rallyists and government commando forces were equally responsible for a firing on 2 September. He also promised to establish a commission of inquiry. *SWB*, 11 Sept. 1991, SU/1174, B/16.


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political change. In 1986, the nuclear accident at Chernobyl and the riots at Alma Ata; in 1988, the Sumgait massacre and the earthquake in Armenia; in 1989, the earthquake in Tadjikistan, the brutal crackdown in Tbilisi by security forces and the miners' strikes in Kuzbass, Donbass and Vorkuta; in 1990, the civil war in Armenia and Azerbaijan, and near famine, would qualify as major internal inputs for political combustion. In 1991, this was achieved by the failed coup in August.

These factors were more or less of an independent nature i.e. they were, by and large, unpredictable developments. Nevertheless, their impact on the system proved to be decisive. The specifics of this argument have been dealt with in the previous chapters. They have shown us how fundamental changes of the political system were compelled by these events. These changes include the move to democratize the party through electoral reform, the urgency to introduce radical economic reform without a well-worked out ideological and theoretical position, the timing of the abolition of Ar. 6 from the Soviet constitution of 1977, the pressure to draft a new all-union treaty and a multi-party system with a directly elected presidency. These events thus
provided the decisive turns in the course of political change.

(a) The Coup and After

Of all these events, perhaps, the most intriguing was undoubtedly the failed putsch of August 1991. Several accounts of this dramatic event have been published. These include, Gorbachev's version, Anatoly Lukianov's version, Yeltsin's version and Shevardnadze's version that provide four different perspectives to the event. This in itself should make a fascinating study. Charges have been traded of the coup having been engineered by Gorbachev himself; in cahoots with Yeltsin; by Gennady Yanayev and other members of the State Committee for the State of Emergency (SCSE) and so on. The truth probably is much simpler. However, our task is to unravel the impact of this event on the process of political change. We are not really concerned with

unravelling the conspiracy, for no matter who was actually behind the coup its net implication would remain the same for the system.

We had begun this section with the shifting locus of power and seen the influence of the external environment on this. In the year 1991, internal pressure on the locus of power was brought to bear on the leadership of the USSR due to the coup. The coup exclusively focussed attention on the leadership. It brought into sharp focus, what had been developing as a rivalry between Gorbachev and Yeltsin. The ever-weakening status of Gorbachev was dealt a decisive blow as the coup underlined the fact that power had shifted out of Gorbachev's hands as union president and was now vested in that of Yeltsin. More than discrediting the CPSU, it had built up the stature of Yeltsin as heir apparent to Gorbachev's mantle.67 In Soviet history, no other president or general secretary has had to face such a naked test of his power and legitimate authority. When Gorbachev returned to Moscow unscathed, instead of being accorded a hero's

67. Indeed, at the fifth extra-ordinary CPD, it was Yeltsin who defended Gorbachev's dignity to tremendous applause. He said, "I believe in Gorbachev considerably more than I did even three weeks ago, prior to the putsch", SWB, 4 September 1991, SU/1168, i.
welcome he was viewed with relief for having survived the coup and with suspicion, regarding his part in it. It is this ambiguity in the popular perception, irrespective of the veracity of the different charges concerning his role in the coup, that decisively tilted the balance in favour of Yeltsin.

This is borne out by the four different versions of the coup alluded to earlier, which agree on Gorbachev's tacit, if not explicit, complicity in having let the situation come to this pass. Shevardnadze, one of Gorbachev's staunchest supporters, had this to say on 24 August 1991:

And now I am completely certain that none other than Gorbachev himself had been spoon-feeding the junta [coup-makers] with his indecisiveness, his inclination to back and fill, his fellow-travelling, his poor judgement of people, his indifference towards his true allies, his distrust of the democratic forces, and his disbelief in the bulwark whose name is the people - the very same people who had changed thanks to the perestroika he had begun.68

This was the judgment of a close friend of Gorbachev.

The view of his political rival, Boris Yeltsin was even more damning. "Unlike most democrats, I surmised that the

threat of dictatorship...also came from Gorbachev himself."69 Yeltsin's analysis of the coup begins with the claim that "By late winter and early spring 1991, Gorbachev was sick of perestroika. He clearly saw the dead end into which the country had run".70 The position of presidency, Yeltsin claims, was carved by Gorbachev for his own protection from the communists. Then Gorbachev was forced into the idea of a new union treaty, being buffeted by both the left and right. He thus, "managed to buy himself more time".71 This was followed by the Novo-Ogarevo process, which Yeltsin claims, caused the coup.72

The significant point of interest in Yeltsin's analysis comes from the reasons he gives for Gorbachev's initiative

70. ibid, p.16.
71. ibid, p.24.
72. ibid, pp.38-39. Yeltsin refers to a closed door meeting of Gorbachev, Nazarbayev and himself where they agreed to dismiss all those who later turned out to be members of the emergency committee. Meanwhile, there was also former Soviet minister, N. Vorontsov's statement on 1 September 1991 on Russian Television, wherein he suggested that Pavlov had asked about imposing emergency. This was apparently a day before the opening of the RSFSR, CPD session, on 27 March 1991, at the time when the miners' strike had complicated the situation in the USSR; see, SWB, 3 September 1991, SU/1167, i.
on the union treaty. Suggesting that Gorbachev knew of the preparation for a "step-by-step model for a future coup d'etat", he said:

"It was impossible to manoeuvre between right and left in this situation. Gorbachev was now faced with the terrible necessity of having to choose sides. With this harsh choice, he was stripped of his chief weapon - the political game, the manoeuvre, the balancing act. Without that freedom to make endless promises, blocs with various forces, and unexpected moves, Gorbachev was no longer Gorbachev." 73

This was an evaluation strikingly similar to that of Gorbachev's friend, Shevardnadze.

Anatoly Lukianov, accused of being the ideological father of the coup and a sympathiser of the coup-makers, was "inclined to give credence to the version which maintains that Gorbachev acted as agent provocateur". 74 He was at a loss to understand the real motives of Gorbachev at Foros. "Was he thinking, as Gdlian, a deputy of the Supreme Soviet, aptly observed, of returning to Moscow on a red horse in the event of the State Committee for Emergency managing to sustain itself in power, and on a white horse as a supporter

73. ibid, p.24.

of democracy in the event of the Democrats winning?" 75 He too evaluates Gorbachev as a confused person with no firm convictions of his own.

Finally, Gorbachev himself unwittingly concedes the point in his own account of the coup. The tone of his admission however, betrays his willingness to accept the pat on the back from the USA rather than brickbats from home:

In a conversation I had on 11 September [1991] with...James Baker I heard him say: "In the last few days George Bush and I have given a lot of thought, Mr. President, to your policy and we have now understood your course of manoeuvre and compromise. You wanted to gain time so as not to allow conservative forces to wreck the policy of reform."

Yes, that is how it really was. ...It was precisely in such a tense situation that the President of the USSR and the leaders of nine republics gathered in Novo-Ogaryevo. 76

This is a clear admission and unambiguously agrees very well with the other three versions, except, at home Gorbachev stood alone in thinking that it was good that he adopted the "course of manoeuvre and compromise".

(b) Yeltsin's Rise

75. ibid. For an elaboration on Lukianov's reasons for suspicion see, pp.122-4.


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While Gorbachev's leadership suffered from various stigmas, the military operational side of the coup, ironically, focused on the Russian Supreme Soviet building. When Yeltsin stood on one of the tanks stationed outside and issued his dramatic call for resistance on the night of 19 August, his test for assuming Gorbachev's mantle had begun. As the crowd swelled in front of the Russian Supreme Soviet, so did Yeltsin's stature. He later ascribed his success to two factors. Firstly, he felt that the coup-makers were stumped as they did not anticipate "a totally public fight on their hands". Secondly, Yeltsin had correctly anticipated that Defence Minister Yazov would have put Gen. Pavel Grachev in charge. "It was he who had been entrusted with running the whole military-operational side of the coup." While Grachev turned out to be a Yeltsin supporter, Yazov was not. Indeed, Yazov had actively advocated imposing emergency since December 1990. "Order must be imposed in the country. But how this will be done - in the form of presidential rule, or a state of emergency - is the prerogative of the president of

77. Yeltsin, n.69, p.57.
78. Ibid, p.60.
The turn of events upon Gorbachev's return further strengthened Yeltsin's hands. On 22 August, Gorbachev wanted to "fight to the end for the renewal of the party". The next day, Gorbachev's appearance at the RSFSR Supreme Soviet was like taming the lion in its den. Here he was one-upped by Yeltsin. He was forced to read the record of the meeting of the USSR's cabinet ministers on 19 August, in which the quiet acquiescence of the entire cabinet became evident. Moreover, no party member present at the cabinet meeting had objected either. Gorbachev was thus forced to agree to dissolve the entire cabinet and further agree that Yeltsin would take over in future, in case of another emergency, and vice-versa.

The shift in the balance of power was complete.

With the complicity of the top leadership of the party and the USSR cabinet, save Gorbachev, becoming evident, followed by the clear one-up-manship of Yeltsin, it became

79. Tass report quotes Yazov, SWB, 21 December 1990, SU/0953, i.


equally evident that Gorbachev's future lay with the presidency and not the general secretaryship. As it is Gorbachev had begun to distance himself from the party as President, as we saw in chapter III. Moreover, the forces of change had begun to leave the CPSU. Shevardnadze had resigned in December 1990. Yakovlev, another close Gorbachev aide, did so on 28 July 1991. He had even warned of an impending coup on 16 August. 82 Both of them had resigned from the CPSU also. They had also regrouped with seven other prominent liberals in the form of the Democratic Reform Movement. 83 Added to this was the fact that party membership had fallen to the level of 1973, admitted at the July plenum of the central committee. 84 The CPSU's financial position was precarious too with a minimum drop of R 650 mill. in its income, admitted in September 1990. 85


84. See Gorbachev's plenum speech, Tass. Full text in SWB, n.6.

85. Interview of spokesman N. Kapanets, business manager, CPSU, Pravda, 14 September 1990 and quoted by Tass in SWB, 15 September 1990, SU/0870, i.
In effect, the CPSU had become a moribund organisation. With the developments of 23 August 1991, Gorbachev was quick to realise that his position as general secretary of the CPSU was redundant. The popular demand on the streets was for the return of the President of the USSR, not so much the return of the general secretary of the CPSU. He consequently resigned from the post on 24 August and established a committee for the interim management of the economy. The previous day he had already agreed to sign decrees confirming the measures taken by Yeltsin during the coup. These included a decree suspending the Russian Communist Party, pending a judicial enquiry. 86 Similarly, action was taken against the CPSU by the USSR, Supreme Soviet on 29 August. 87 Thus, inspite of giving a call for the renewal of the party Gorbachev resigned from its general secretaryship.

The coup was not so much in defence of socialism, a word that found no mention in the SCSE's statements, but was in

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86. SWB, n.81.

defence of the union. However, with the coup, and the primacy of the CPSU and bodies of state power of the USSR being usurped by those of Russia, the process of forging a new union treaty lost more ground. The agreement reached on 14 November broke down by 25 November. The USSR never recovered from that.

**GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE**

The central theme of this section is to address the question: what happened to the Soviet political system as the Soviet Union ceased to exist? For this, the inter-relationship of the USSR and its aftermath, the CIS, is important. There are essentially four aspects of this relationship that can be seen as the problem of a gap between Soviet theory and practice. In effect, the disintegration of the USSR and the formation of the CIS are a reflection of this gap. While the former represents what the Soviet Union had achieved with socialism and its fulfilment through the 74 years of the communist party's "vanguard" role, the latter represents its aspirations that never really did the

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88. Text of the statement put out by the SCSE in *Economic Times*, 20 August 1991, p.3.
transition from the realm of ideas to the realm of practice. These ideas are those of democratic centralism, the principle of self-determination, and the concept of there being no revolutionary action without revolutionary theory. We will deal with these ideas now.

**Democratic centralism**

Democratic centralism was a mechanism that never worked out as envisioned by theory. This was to be expressed by the CPSU through its practice in all its branches. The party would retain its central control while each of its units continue to represent the proletariat at every level. In practice, the party itself had become a vast bureaucracy that had lost much of its representative character. Moreover, the unitary character of the party's action further impeded its democratic potential from being exploited. This had in practice become a ritual. 89

By 1991, when glasnost and the party's own efforts at renewing itself fell into direct conflict over its relation

with the state, democratic centralism came under severe attack from the reformists within the CPSU. The trouble was that ever since multi-candidate elections proved the unpopularity of prominent party members, on the one hand, and the separation of party and state power was given effect with the 19th Party Conference, on the other, democratic centralism became redundant. It had been a principle used by the CPSU to mark its presence everywhere, in every organisation and body of state power.

On 20 July 1991, Yeltsin banned the activities of all political organizations from both republican and union bodies within the Russian Federation. Government bodies were now to take precedence over party ones. This was followed up at the 25 July plenum that discussed the new party programme, by Gorbachev, who spoke of a "democratic federation of sovereign republics" that would recognize "the principle of independence of the republican parties included in the CPSU".\(^9\) Democratic centralism was thus, buried.

Though it remained just a "theory" in Soviet history, it was never anything more than a cover for the legitimacy and

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\(^9\) Text of CPSU draft programme, Pravda, n.7. Quotes on Cl/3 and Cl/6 respectively.
authority of the party. In 1990 itself the concept came under attack, but was then vociferously defended by Gorbachev.

**Self-Determination**

Very much on the same lines was the criticism of the principle of self-determination. Having been declared as a part of the Soviet constitution of 1977, its invocation, especially by the Baltic republics and South Ossetia in Georgia, and the districts of Dniestr and Gagauz in Moldova, exposed the dangerous lacunae in the constitution. Gorbachev tried to give effect to it. He continued to defend the "Leninist principle", of the voluntary union of republics on the basis of self-determination.

The result was the redrafting of the union treaty an umpteen number of times and its eventual failure. The difficulty was in identifying clearly the point where republican autonomy ends and that of the centre begins. The pre-Gorbachev years had defined this point well by ensuring that Ar.72 was never invoked. However, in the Gorbachev years declarations of sovereignty became incompatible with the constitution of 1977 (amended). The constitution had come into being in its amended form in 1988, even before a complete consensus on its provisions relating to the union of
the republics could emerge. While a new parliament was being created the USSR was still carrying the baggage of the old constitution.

In 1991, when the draft union treaty was being "negotiated" in Novo-Ogarevo after the March referendum, even Yeltsin had expressed surprise over the vast powers ceded by the centre to the republics:

What Gorbachev then said at the meeting far exceeded my expectations. The president of the USSR announced that he would consent to signing a new union treaty that would significantly weaken the influence of Moscow center on the Soviet Union's republics. He also very much advocated a new constitution, after which the existing legislative bodies - the CPD and the USSR, Supreme Soviet - would be dissolved and direct elections for a new president would be held.91

The initiative for such far-reaching change in existing centre-republic relations came from Gorbachev and Gorbachev alone. There was no involvement of the CPSU in the process.

At that time this concession was obviously an act of desperation for Gorbachev to save his own position. There was no real application of any Leninist principle of self-determination. This was straightforward politicking.

Gorbachev succeeded in saving himself but at a terrific cost. This was the destruction of any semblance of the principle of self-determination. Three leaders had simply by-passed the parliament and struck a bargain at Novo-Ogarevo.

Ironically, exactly the same logic was applied when on 8 December 1991 just three leaders met and dissolved the USSR. The point is not that their action was legal or illegal, for they were all directly elected presidents. They had the mandate. The March referendum, while preserving the union had also supported absolute sovereignty of the republics. The referendum was hardly uniform in its application. Moreover, Yeltsin's direct election as the president of the most powerful republic was in June 1991, i.e. after the March referendum. Yeltsin did not mince his words about his plans for a Russia free of communism.

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94. For a representative selection of Yeltsin's views during his campaign, see, "RSFSR Presidential Campaign", in SWB, 3 June 1991, SU/1088, C/1 - C/8. See also, for an elaboration, Imam, n.13, p.393.
point is that the meeting of the three Slav leaders on 8 December 1991 proved that the politician had become powerful enough to influence the fate of the union. It was political ambition that worked, not any principle of self-determination.95

Revolutionary Theory and Action

It is easy to see how democratic centralism and the Leninist principle of self-determination were ideas that reinforced each other to form the political fabric of the USSR. With the weakening of one, the other had to get affected. Again, one of the principal reasons for this is the lack, in practice, of a revolutionary theory to back revolutionary action in the Gorbachev era. This point has already been discussed in this chapter while discussing the ideological and theoretical orientation of perestroika. In the context of the gap between "theory" and practice one would only like to add that a "revolutionary theory" was yet another important link that held the political fabric of the

95. For an analysis that juxtaposes the question of nationalist revival with a power struggle see Leokadia Drobizheva, "To Each His Own Nationalism", Seminar, n.92, pp.39-43.
USSR together. The central role of the CPSU was in formulating such a "theory" or guide to action.

While in the days of Stalin, "theory" was replaced by dictates of the general secretary, in the days of Gorbachev, theory was either discarded or made the hand-maiden of practice. In the Gorbachev days the primacy of "theory" was replaced by the primacy of experience.96 This was a theme often found in all of Gorbachev's speeches. In removing the constraints of ideology that Gorbachev had claimed was a product of Stalinism, he removed the central role of "theory" itself.

CONCLUSION

The curtain came down on the USSR when Gorbachev legitimized the CIS by resigning as President on 25 December 1991. On 19 December itself Yeltsin had issued decrees bringing under Russian control all ministries of the former USSR, except that of Defence and that of Atomic Power and

96. Interestingly, Stalin too was a great follower of Lenin, like Gorbachev. Stalin's criticism of the "theory" of spontaneity as a "theory of opportunism" and characterising it as "the ideology of trade unionism" could well hold for Gorbachev's emphasis on practice and experience rather than "theory". See, J. Stalin, Problems of Leninism (Moscow, 1945), p.27.
Industry. Gorbachev's resignation was redundant when it came. After all, he had agreed with Yeltsin on 5 December 1991 that the draft treaty approved the previous day by the lower house, i.e. the USSR Soviet of the Union, was meaningless without the Ukraine.97

Intriguingly, it is only the day after this meeting that the Supreme Soviet of the Ukraine decided not to ratify any union treaty. However, the Ukraine's decision was naturally bound by the overwhelming result of its referendum, paving the way for its independence. Though the referendum was overwhelming, one can't help but notice how opinion in the Ukraine was being fashioned by the Western powers in early 1991, most significantly through the visit of George Bush. His fine act of balancing notwithstanding, the fact that he visited the Ukraine at all was a shot in the arm of the separatist movement. Rukh had criticised his balancing act, demanding greater recognition from Bush of their demands for

independence. 98

In the final analysis, the disintegration of the USSR brought to an abrupt end the process of political change in it. However, the disintegration was clearly not because of a decaying political system, but because the political system was abandoned mid-way in its renewal. Politicking and political ambitions had replaced a system of privileges and a large bureaucracy. As Yeltsin himself remarked on the new presidents of the republics, "they all dreamed of elevating their own status; all of them wanted to become full-fledged members of the UN". 99

1991, more than any year, saw the step by step dismantling of the centre. Gorbachev's decrees were being rejected from January itself. For instance, the Georgian

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98. Particularly, see Gorbachev's statement regretting the US assurance on granting the Ukraine recognition in case the referendum votes for independence. "Such a report causes bewilderment, all the more so since it appeared on the very eve of the coup." Cf. SWB, 30 November 1991, SU/1243, i. Bush, however, reasserted US interests in a phone call to Gorbachev on 30 November 1991. He had also given orders for converting the US consulate into a full embassy in Kiev - All-Union Radio, Mayak reported. SWB, 2 December 1991, SU/1244, A1/2 - A1/3. Also see N. Svanidze's commentary on Russian TV on 29 November 1991. He claimed that "the USA is making a decisive choice", by the timing of its move. SWB, ibid, A1/3.

99. Yeltsin, n.69, p.110.
Supreme Soviet rejected on 9 January Gorbachev's decree of 7 January that annulled South Ossetia's September 1990 declaration of secession from Georgia.\(^{100}\) Similarly, Yeltsin set up a Russian KGB unit in May 1991 as a part of a move to establish sovereign state structures for his republic.\(^{101}\) There were also efforts to pursue an economic union parallel to the negotiations on the draft union treaty. For instance, an economic "community" was formed by eight republics on 18 October 1991. The memorandum of 29 October 1991, wherein Soviet foreign debt was shared by the republics "jointly and severally" (instead of being divided up) further made the centre's role redundant.\(^{102}\) The memorandum had been influenced by the visit of a delegation of the G-7 countries to Moscow who had a $60,000 bill stake in Soviet foreign debt.

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101. The media was agog with the new police force that was born of the KGB and could rival the parent body. See, for instance, Izvestia, 1 November 1991, union edn. on division of powers between the USSR and the RSFSR, KGB. Cf. SWB, 6 November 1991, SU/1222, B/6 - B/7.

102. Tass reported on eight republics agreeing to form an Economic Community. SWB 21 October 1991, SU/1208, i. Also see, excerpts from Central Television report on signing C1/1 - C1/4, and a copy of the treaty C1/5 - C1/9.
In this manner, the union had already been robbed bit by bit of its support structures. Undoubtedly, the haste in introducing elements of perestroika without working out its political philosophy proved disastrous at the level of policy-making. As a process of political change, perestroika could not reach its full potential, as new institutions were created and destroyed rapidly. With the steady erosion of the centre's power and Gorbachev's popularity, a rival centre of power grew in the Russian Federation, led by Yeltsin. While the constituent republics and Yeltsin had their own plans the only factor that helped in preserving the union was economic interdependence. Economics was at best a pressure point for political change, though not a compelling factor. Solutions were available, but implemented piece-meal. Power had shifted decisively out of the centre to the republics. The coup put a stamp of permanence on it while elevating Yeltsin's stature, whose agenda was always anti-communist. The external and internal environments kept throwing up instances that betrayed the haphazard nature of perestroika. The Soviet political system, which hitherto had stressed on the relation between "theory" and practice, although dogmatically, suddenly found itself robbed of any theory.
Political change in the USSR between 1985 and 1991 was undoubtedly revolutionary. It proved to be a unique experience of socialism in Europe. While Soviet society was getting revitalized, the revitalization of the party lagged behind. It is in this regard that perestroika fell victim to the process of political change. Gorbachev's perestroika had thrown the baby out with the bathwater, and the republics of the former USSR are still to recover from the loss.