PREFACE

This is a study of political change in the characteristic environment of the USSR during the tumultuous Gorbachev years. In these seven years the Soviet Union underwent a plethora of changes, some initiated by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and some, by extenuating circumstances. The dynamic interaction of these two factors set into motion a process of political change that was both unpredictable and endemic in the former USSR.

A peculiar characteristic of these political changes appears to be a not too insignificant role of outside political systems, particularly of the West. A characteristic mix of domestic and outside inputs was thus marked. Nevertheless, the collapse of the Soviet Union was never considered inevitable or predestined. The situation was always perceived as an evolving crisis.

This study seeks to understand how perestroika politically changed the USSR from a union of socialist states to a commonwealth of independent ones.

Divided into five chapters, this study seeks to put into some kind of order the almost chaotic development of the Soviet political system during the Gorbachev years. This
is attempted by tracing the course of perestroika through the years from 1985 to 1991.

To do this a suitable framework of analysis has been evolved, which forms the subject in chapter I. Towards this end various approaches to the study of political change in the USSR have been scrutinised, as for instance, the totalitarian approach, political culture and civil society, the economy, ethnicity and nationalism, Russian history, etc. Consequently, certain themes emerged as common to these approaches.

The framework of analysis, thus evolved, helps us to focus attention on four such themes. These are; (i) the dilemma of continuity and change in the Soviet system; (ii) the relation between Soviet economics and politics; (iii) the simultaneous occurrence of multiple and distinct processes of change; and (iv) the recurrence of a gap between Soviet "theory" and practice.

Each of chapters II - IV focuses attention on two years in sequence, i.e. 1985-1986, 1987-1988 and 1989-1990. In each chapter the period covered is examined by keeping our four themes constantly in our frame of analysis. Thus, in chapters II - IV we progressively develop our understanding of perestroika. The analysis contained in
chapter IV closely depends on the conclusions arrived at in chapter III, which in turn depends closely on the conclusions arrived at in chapter II.

This interlinking process is then brought to its logical conclusion in chapter V, which exclusively focuses attention on the last year of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, i.e. 1991. This study thus seeks to understand the chaotic course of *perestroika*.

As the analysis contained in chapter V depends on the conclusions arrived at in the previous chapters, it brings to a conclusion our understanding of political change during the Gorbachev years. This obviates the need for a separate chapter of conclusions. Obviously, this is not a study exclusively on the disintegration of the USSR, yet, our analysis throws some light on the subject.

This study mainly relies on published materials of the party, state and other documents. Most of these documents are available in authoritative English texts, particularly in the *Summary of World Broadcasts, Reprints from the Soviet Press* and *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*. Hence, one does not have to always look for Russian language sources. Moreover, these primary sources are printed further and supplemented by a large number of research articles,
journals and serials in India and abroad. As it is, one does not see that this study is in any way lacking in sources.

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Now that you know where to lay the blame, "Read on, Gentle Reader".

(Vidya Shankar Aiyar)