Preface

From the early 1920s until the late 1980s the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had a virtual monopoly on political power in the USSR. Its real political role was first openly acknowledged in the 1977 constitution, which specified in 'Article 6' that the CPSU was the "leading and guiding force of Soviet society and the nucleus of its political system, of all state organizations and public bodies". These were not mere empty words. The Party through the nomenklatura system, controlled all positions of executive authority. It enjoyed an effective monopoly of the right to nominate candidates at local and national elections. Its deputies through the formation of party groups, dominated the Soviets in which they were elected. It had a network of branches in factories, farms and offices throughout the USSR. It controlled the media, the courts, trade unions and all other forms of associational life through the operation of its leading role in the wider society.

Beginning in 1987, this system of control was subject to challenge both by internal Party reformers and by forces external to the Party. That the Leninist concept of democratic centralism, the ban on fractions within the party and the unchallenged sway of the ideal of monolithic unity of the party would give way to the end of the party's monopoly of political power, its all pervasive supervision of the country's vast economy, and the emergence of pluralism, could hardly be anticipated when Gorbachev first introduced his reform programme. The failed coup d'etat of August 1991 marked the end of an era for the CPSU. The events, intended by the perpetrators to protect the old system of power, ended up assuring its final collapse.

The collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 and the stated intention of establishing a democratic political order in Post-Soviet Russia, has confronted the people of that country with new challenges in circumstances of economic and social