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Andropov's most significant contribution was to promote younger and more vigorous party officials, such as Mikhail Gorbachev, and remove aging Brezhnev holdovers. His long bout with a fatal kidney disease thwarted his efforts at mild change, and the tragic shoot-down of a Korean airliner over Soviet airspace in September 1983 prevented him from realizing his plans for better relations with the United States. As the end drew near for him, he attempted to arrange his succession and pass on his position to the young Gorbachev. Weeks before his death, Andropov asked the Central Committee to entrust the leadership of the Politburo and Secretariat to Gorbachev. But when the memo was distributed to the Central Committee, the old foxes in the Politburo, led by the Brezhnev loyalist Konstantin Chernenko, left his request out. Not ready for a much younger man, they maneuvered to have Gorbachev passed over when Andropov died on February 9, 1984, at the age of 69.

THE BRIEF REIGN OF KONSTANTIN CHERNENKO

Four days after Andropov's death, the Central Committee elected the aged, infirm Konstantin Chernenko (1911-85) as general secretary of the party. A colorless bureaucrat whose only distinction was his fidelity to Brezhnev, Chernenko followed Brezhnev up the party ladder, becoming a member of the Central Committee in 1971 and a full member of the Politburo in 1978. As the last leader from the older generation that came up through the ranks of Stalinism, Chernenko was clearly the last gasp of a political apparatus devoid of ideas and energy. The Politburo was a gerontocracy. Seven members were in their seventies, two in their sixties, and only two, including Gorbachev, the youngest, in their fifties. This group of aging men were the rulers of the Soviet Union in the year 1984, the year that the British novelist George Orwell had chosen in 1948 as his metaphorical warning about a war-rife totalitarian world. But in the USSR 1984 was marked by a high degree of stability and continuity, a kind of calm before the storm. Tense relations continued between the superpowers, symbolized by the Soviet refusal to participate in the Los Angeles Olympics.

The younger leaders promoted by Andropov already played leading roles in policy formation and execution under Chernenko's reign. In December 1984 it was Gorbachev who gave the key address to the Central Committee plenum. Later that month he traveled to Great Britain to meet Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who confirmed that "this was a man one could work with." When Chernenko died on March 10, 1985, the Politburo recommended Gorbachev to the Central Committee for election within twenty-four hours. The dean of the older generation, Andrei Gromyko, nominated Gorbachev, whom he referred to as a man with a nice smile but iron teeth.

THE ROAD TO RADICAL REFORM

Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev became leader of the Soviet Union at the age of 54. His election as general secretary marked a dramatic shift in power from the older to the younger generation of Soviet politicians. Born on March 2, 1931, in the Stavropol region of southern Russia and raised on a collective farm, he saw the destruction of villages and towns during the German invasion of the Soviet Union in World War II. He studied law at Moscow State University, where he joined the Communist Party in 1952. After graduating he returned to Stavropol, rising steadily through the ranks of the Communist Party. He became first secretary of the Stavropol City Communist Party Committee in September 1966 and four years later party leader of the entire Stavropol region. Gorbachev's achievements brought him to the attention of Andropov; in 1978 he was called to the capital and placed in charge of agricultural affairs and in October 1980 made a full member of the Politburo.

Gorbachev came to power as a reformer determined to liberalize the Soviet system but without a clear idea of how far change would have to reach. He was at one and the same time the greatest extender of freedom and democracy in modern history and the gravedigger of the Bolshevik Revolution. His reform became a revolution that failed to save the system, destroyed the Soviet Union, ended the Cold War, and seriously weakened Russia vis-à-vis the West.

The first stage of the "Gorbachev revolution" did not foreshadow what was to come. From roughly March 1985 to December 1986, Gorbachev promoted a slow, cautious Andropov-like reform well within the confines of the existing system. In April 1985 he called for "acceleration" in the economy, greater labor discipline, higher labor productivity, and an end to corruption. His first major campaign, which was extremely unpopular, was the unlamented antialcohol campaign. Though he was cautious at first, as early as April 1985 Gorbachev elaborated his sense that the party and state were not accountable to the people as they should be; the system was too highly centralized, information was constantly being manipulated and falsified, and officials were ignoring the deep, chronic problems of society. He introduced new emphases into the existing official discourse, speaking of the systemic nature of the problems and the need "to speak with people in the language of truth" and to deepen "socialist democracy, the self-government of

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the people." Convinced that economic development required a more informed population and greater freedom for people to make decisions on their own, he pushed for opening up the political structure and the public media. To convince people of the need for radical change, he raised the specter of a fundamental breakdown of the system.

In order to carry out the changes he contemplated, Gorbachev needed to form a broad coalition within the Communist Party. Like his predecessors, Gorbachev quickly rid himself of political rivals and assembled a younger team of leaders. A month after he became general secretary, he added three new members to the Politburo: Egor Ligachev, Nikolai Ryzhkov, and Viktor Chebrikov, head of the KGB. He named Edward Shevardnadze, the Georgian party chief, as foreign minister, elevated the aging Gromyko to president, and made Ryzhkov prime minister. At the end of 1985 Gorbachev brought in Boris Yeltsin, a fiery party chieftain from the Urals, to become head of the Moscow party organization. But below the new echelon of top leaders, the Communist Party, which numbered 19 million members, was divided between those who favored reform (and probably made up a minority) and those fearful of it. Few party officials agreed with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, who had met in years past and agreed that "things could not go on as they were."

Gorbachev's principal political weapon was the traditions and habits of obedience within the party to the general secretary. Somehow he needed to animate the huge, lethargic body of the party to act in ways it had not for many decades and to carry out policies that threatened its own power, prestige, and normal mode of operation. Gorbachev opened the party's Twenty-Seventh Congress in February 1986 with a five-hour speech about the need for "radical reform" (*perestroika*) and more "socialist democracy" but he was not specific about what this entailed. He attacked the inertia and apathy of the recent past and called for a more flexible system of economic management along with greater input from below by workers, but he made no gesture toward the more radical market reforms instituted in Hungary and China. Using the rhetoric of democracy, Gorbachev encouraged greater openness, more publicity about shortcomings, introducing a second Russian word, *glasnost*, into the international lexicon. "Communists," he said, "want the truth, always and under all circumstances." "Government should not be the privilege of a narrow circle of professionals."

The Congress adopted a new party program, the first since the Khrushchev program of 1961. Whereas the old program had spoken of a rapid transition to Communism, to the classless, stateless society promised by Marx, the new program referred to the "systematic and all-round improvement of socialism," which was defined as including "genuine democracy—power exercised for the people and by the people." But long years of inflated language from Soviet officials made it difficult to give real meaning to talk about socialism. The Congress maintained the same stage-managed form of previous congresses, and the style of the discussions did not differ much from those during Brezhnev's life. Several speakers attacked nonconformists, dissident writers, and even video recorders, which

was claimed, were used to spread alien ideas, immorality, and a cult of violence. Ligachev, emerging as the leader of the more conservative forces at the top of the party, took the party newspaper *Pravda* to task for publishing letters that were too critical of the privileges of party leaders. A careful listener could discern differences between the tones of conservatives and reformers, and few could mistake the message in the dynamic speech of Boris Yeltsin when he denounced "time-servers in possession of party cards" and admitted that in the past he had personally lacked the courage and political experience" to criticize failings in party work.

Having taken power more quickly than any of his predecessors, Gorbachev had considerable strengths as a leader. Impressive was Gorbachev's intelligence, personal charm and graciousness, and his ability to forge broad political coalitions that linked reformers and conservatives. His style of leadership was less confrontational than others, and he tried to find compromises and avoid the use of force and violence, all while prodding the party and society along the road of reform. Against his wife, Raisa, proved to be an asset, at least abroad, though many Soviets, unused to a female presence near the center of power, were upset at her growing visibility. At the same time Gorbachev tended to be long-winded, his speeches often rambling on for hours, and his southern Russian accent annoyed many intellectuals. More importantly, he often postponed decisions and made poor personnel choices. Finally and most decisively, he did not really understand the depth of Soviet structural weaknesses or have a clear vision of where his reforms were leading.

Gorbachev's success or failure depended from the beginning on the ability of his administration to get the stagnant Soviet economy moving again. As Gorbachev began his second year as general secretary, the Soviet economy was buffeted by a series of misfortunes. On April 26, 1986, a surge of power at reactor no. 4 at the Chernobyl nuclear power station in Ukraine produced steam and hydrogen, which led to an explosion and fire with flames ten feet high. Radioactive dust spewed into the air and spread into Belorussia and toward Europe. Forty thousand people were evacuated from the nearby town of Pripyat; at least thirty people died and three hundred were hospitalized. One of the most immediate casualties was the credibility of the Gorbachev regime, which hesitated to release information on the accident for several days after the event. Wild rumors and sensational stories of thousands of deaths filled the Western press. Although after the initial silence the Soviet media were filled with daily reports on the consequences of the accident, the Chernobyl explosion exposed the resistance of officials to dealing openly with problems. Only in the summer were the officials responsible for the disaster removed from their positions. The burden of cleaning up the aftermath of Chernobyl fell on a weakening Soviet economy.

A second blow to Gorbachev's reforms came from the collapse of world oil prices. As the largest producer of oil in the world, the Soviet Union would have benefited from high world oil prices, but when oil prices fell precipitously, the Soviet Union was forced to borrow more money abroad. The economy had no cushion to fall back on and needed to become more productive very quickly.

Still, a few positive signs could be noted in the first years of Gorbachev's rule. Industrial output grew 5.6 percent in the first half of 1986, as compared to the same period in 1985, while labor productivity in industry rose 5.2 percent. Even the chronic weak spot in Soviet economic performance, agriculture, showed some improvement. The high prices for wine and vodka were very unpopular, as were the long lines that formed at the reduced number of outlets for alcohol. Nevertheless, when statistics on infant mortality and life expectancy (which earlier had been suppressed) were again published, they showed that infant mortality rates had improved since the high point of 1974 and that deaths from accidents, poisoning, and injuries had declined by 24 percent since 1985.

GLASNOST AND THE EROSION OF AUTHORITY

In order to weaken the antiforealist conservatives in the party and the state economy, Gorbachev desperately needed allies in society. He removed thousands of party and government officials as the press printed critical articles discussing every aspect of Soviet life, past and present, and attempted to mobilize the intelligentsia as the spearhead of the antibureaucratic movement. Gorbachev urged writers to be innovative and bold, and many among the progressive intelligentsia, like the controversial poet Evtushenko, echoed the party leader in the hope that "self-flattery will be forever rejected, and that openness will become the norm of civic behavior." Step by step censorship fell away, and banned works were published or released to movie theaters. In the theater new plays were staged that explored hitherto forbidden themes like the collectivization of the peasantry, the Cuban missile crisis, and the evils of Stalinism. In the summer of 1986 the party appointed liberal editors to several major national periodicals, and Gorbachev met with writers and explained his view that "a ruling stratum lies between the leadership of the country and the people, who wish for change, who dream of change—the apparatus of ministers, the apparatus of the party, which does not want transformations, which does not intend to lose certain rights tied to privileges." A few months later he met with social scientists and spoke about the opposition he faced within the ruling elites: "The old does not give up without a fight... Some attempts are being made to squeeze the concepts of acceleration and perestroika into the framework of obsolete dogmas and stereotypes, emasculating their novelty and revolutionary essence in the process."

Steadily Gorbachev loosened party controls on Soviet society. He released prominent dissidents from prison and exile, and in December 1986 placed a telephone call to Andrei Sakharov, the Soviet Union's most distinguished dissident, then in exile in the Volga city of Gorky, and invited him to return to Moscow. Sakharov agreed to help Gorbachev in his efforts at reform but as a critic pushing for greater liberalization and democracy. The invitation to Sakharov was the most dramatic attempt at a new relationship between the party and the intelligentsia, but Gorbachev's search for allies unleashed new critical forces without securing the kind of support that the general secretary desired.

The new openness in the media exposed the weaknesses of the Soviet system to a public thirsty for truth about the past and present. Intellectuals and journalists attacked the encrusted ideological orthodoxies that a year earlier had been untouchable. Early in 1987 economists disputed the reliability of Soviet economic statistics, revealed that Soviet labor productivity was among the lowest in the industrialized world, and stated boldly that the Soviet economy had been operated "in defiance... of the laws of economic life" since the 1920s. One critic wrote:

Apathy and indifference, stealing and disrespect for honest work have all become commonplace, along with aggressive envy of those who earn a lot, even if they earn it honestly... We must call things by their true names: stupidity is stupidity, incompetence is incompetence, and active Stalinism is active Stalinism.

A serious discussion of the need for markets or a return to the NEP policies of the 1920s raged in the press, but Gorbachev moved slowly, hesitantly toward free markets and market pricing.

After a year and a half in office, Gorbachev came to realize that economic improvements and social development could not occur without the democratization of the political structure. "Some comrades," he told the Central Committee in January 1987, "apparently find it hard to understand that democratization is not just a slogan but the essence of perestroika." "We must not retreat," he said. "We have nowhere to retreat to." Gorbachev was setting himself and his program against the very people who had put him in power, the party apparatus. He tried, and failed, to convince them that there ought to be multicandidate elections by secret ballot within the party for secretaries of committees. Though the Central Committee was resistant, in his concluding speech to the meeting, which was unprecedentedly televised to the nation, Gorbachev disingenuously claimed that "members of the Central Committee have spoken in favor" of a party conference to discuss "further democratizing the life of the party and society as a whole." Without a clear majority in either the Central Committee or the Politburo for his most far-reaching reforms, the general secretary had appealed to the public, over the heads of the party, to move further toward a kind of democracy.

The party leadership itself was divided. At one extreme were a few ultra-reformers, like Yeltsin, who openly attacked the privileges of the party apparatus. Yeltsin appealed to the broad, egalitarian sympathies of ordinary Russians. Yeltsin enhanced his popularity by riding the bus to work and frequently visiting and talking frankly with workers. He was a simple, direct man with enormous personal appeal, a politician in full color among the grays of the Soviet bureaucracy. Opposed to Yeltsin was Ligachev, who wanted reform of the Andropov variety and was terrified of the growing mobilization of society and the weakening of party control. Ligachev lashed out against the "wholesale disparagement of everything" and the appearance of "elements of mass bourgeois culture" in the USSR. He attacked the liberal editors of the leading journals as voices of "enemies from abroad." One style of leadership, self-confidently based in a dying political culture, was being pitted against an incoherent, improvised movement toward greater democracy and an uncertain future.

The tension between Yeltsin and Ligachev within the Politburo reached a breaking point by the fall of 1987. Yeltsin wrote to Gorbachev to warn him that "the struggle to maintain political stability can lead to stagnation, to the state of affairs (or something very like it) that we reached before, under Brezhnev." Within a month the Central Committee met to hear Gorbachev's plans for a historic address on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the October Revolution. Yeltsin asked to be allowed to address the meeting and immediately launched into a critique of the top party leadership, their failure to carry out perestroika in a determined fashion, and the continued practice of adulating the general secretary. He then abruptly resigned from the Politburo. Though he had warned Gorbachev of his intentions, the general secretary had tried to persuade him to wait until after the seventieth anniversary celebration of the October Revolution. Yeltsin shocked others, including more liberal figures such as Aleksandr Yakovlev, characterizing Yeltsin's remarks as "immoral" because "he put his personal ambitions and personal interests ahead of the general interests of the party." Shevardnadze said that Yeltsin's speech was "a betrayal of the party." Gorbachev ended the discussion by damning Yeltsin: "You had to go to such a level of vanity, of self-regard, to put your ambitions higher than the interests of the party, than the interests of our work! And that at a moment when we find ourselves at such an important stage of perestroika.... I consider this an irresponsible action." Yeltsin was driven from office officially in mid-November, when he was summoned from his hospital bed by Gorbachev to be subjected to a formal dismissal. Yeltsin suffered a physical collapse and depression and appeared to have been eliminated from politics. But his dismissal turned him into a political martyr, and Muscovites rallied to him. In the new political environment opened by perestroika, Yeltsin, after sixteen months in political disgrace, reemerged as the leader of the opposition to party conservatives and then to Gorbachev himself.

Gorbachev's policies were contradictory and politically dangerous. The attempt to coordinate complex policies of transformation from the center through the instrumentality of the party while actually eroding central state and party power and authority; this in turn permitted regional and republic elites to grow more independent. The Gorbachev reformers both raised new political and material expectations and proved unable to satisfy them. Gorbachev himself wanted to be both Martin Luther and the pope, both revolutionary reformer and defender of the existing power structure. He wavered back and forth, from left to right, for the next few years, alienating both conservatives and more radical reformers. His anniversary speech in November 1987 was a perfect example of his attempt to straddle the two wings of the party (and society) that were pulling further and further apart. He avoided rehabilitating the anti-Stalinist oppositions of the 1920s and instead claimed that "the party's nucleus, headed by J. V. Stalin, upheld Leninism in the ideological struggle." He glorified Stalin's "revolution from above," though he spoke of "real crimes stemming from an abuse of power." The jumbling of critique and praise disappointed the more liberal and radical elements

in the party and intelligentsia and left the country without a clear new interpretation of the significance of the Soviet experience. The speech and the Yeltsin affair began to sow serious doubts among the intelligentsia about Gorbachev's sincerity and commitment to reform. Political mobilization far outstripped the glacial pace of economic development, and the party began to lose the ideological conviction it is right to rule. A political space was opened up for economic protests, like those of the Siberian and Donbass miners, and the massive nationalist movements interrupted, first with the Armenians, in early 1988.

THE NEW THINKING AND THE END OF THE COLD WAR

Gorbachev's first and longest-lasting successes were in foreign policy. His "new thinking" held that the Soviet Union had to retreat in order to rebuild. Foreign policy was to be subordinated to domestic needs, rather than the other way round, and usually been the case since the early Stalin period. Economic development depended on a decrease in international tensions, to create a breathing space for



Figure 19.1 Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan, after signing a nuclear forces reduction agreement, August 1987 (RIA NOVOSTI).

the Soviet Union, and a reduction in the costs of competition with the United States. As Georgii Arbatov told Western visitors, "We are going to do the worst thing we can do to you. We are going to deprive you of an enemy." From their first days in office Gorbachev and Shevardnadze hammered away at the need for containing the nuclear arms race and restricting development of new weapons in space. In November 1985 Gorbachev went to Geneva to meet with President Ronald Reagan, a conservative anti-Communist who considered the Soviet Union to be an "evil empire." At his first summit conference since 1979, the two leaders issued a joint declaration reaffirming the view that nuclear war was unwinnable, a statement that was a significant shift for Reagan. The two men seemed to get along well, but relations between the two superpowers did not immediately realize the promise of the summit. Reagan's defense program, known as the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), or "Star Wars," was an expensive and highly advanced technological deployment of a defensive shield to protect against incoming Soviet nuclear missiles. Such a system, some in the West argued, would require an extremely costly Soviet response, which would tax the poorer USSR and hasten its collapse. But Gorbachev did not in fact raise defense spending to meet the American challenge and instead looked for cheap ways to undermine Star Wars while vigorously pursuing the reduction of nuclear arms by both sides. The argument later made that Reagan's policies led to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, thus, was not based on any evidence. Credit (or blame) for both must be given to Gorbachev.

In October 1986 the American president and the general secretary met in Reykjavik, Iceland, in closed sessions to discuss arms control. Gorbachev surprised the president with a proposal to cut strategic arms by 50 percent within five years and to ban deployment of space-based weaponry for ten years. Reagan, to the shock of his advisors, at first agreed, but then the talks collapsed over a disagreement on Star Wars. The meeting broke up with both sides blaming the other for the failure to come to agreement. Gorbachev and Shevardnadze had to contend, not only with recalcitrance from the Reagan administration to move ahead on arms control and give up SDI, but with Soviet hard-liners, who continued to see "warlike imperialist forces" in the West. Groping toward a new foreign policy for the USSR, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze encouraged foreign policy experts to develop a whole new conception of Soviet interests. Instead of speaking of the division of the world into rival camps, the new thinking emphasized common human values that transcended class conflicts. It upgraded peaceful coexistence from a "specific form of the class struggle" to a frank assertion that all states had certain objective interests and that differences between socialism and capitalism did not preclude cooperation. International relations were to be conducted in a "civilized" manner, without resort to military force, and with respect for the sovereignty and independence of states, including the states of Eastern Europe. Not only was nuclear war unwinnable, but low-level conflicts, like those in the Third World, were dangerous, for they could easily escalate into more threatening conflicts. The concept of national security was broadened from merely

military security to include economic progress and the development of science, technology, and society in general. Gorbachev spoke of closer relations with hopes of building "a common European home" from the Atlantic to the Urals, which would end the isolation of the USSR while taking into consideration American interests. As a dramatic sign of their new thinking, Soviet leaders now considered winding down and eventually withdrawing from the war in Afghanistan. The time Gorbachev traveled to the United States in December to sign an agreement with the Americans limiting intermediate-range nuclear forces, he was regarded by the world community as having seized the initiative in trying to end the Cold War. The trip was a great triumph, complete with elaborate state dinners at the White House, but the impressive prestige and power that Gorbachev displayed in foreign policy eluded him at home. As his stature rose abroad, his popularity and power at home began to wither away.

POLITICS IN A NEW IDIOM

By early 1988 Soviet politics could no longer be contained within the corridors of the Central Committee headquarters on Old Square in Moscow. The streets also spoke, both in the center and in the national republics. The conflict within the party now centered on Yakovlev, the most radical reformer, and Ligachev, the champion of slower change. The conservatives issued a manifesto in the form of a letter from a neo-Stalinist chemistry teacher in Leningrad named Nina Andreeva. The letter, entitled "I Cannot Deny My Principles," appeared on March 13 in the today newspaper *Soviet Russia* and had evidently been encouraged by Ligachev, who praised the letter at a meeting with newspaper editors. Andreeva's call for a "balanced" assessment of Stalinism created a sensation among intellectuals, who feared this was a sign that glasnost and perestroika were about to be reversed. At first there was no official response from Gorbachev, who was traveling in Yugoslavia. It was three weeks after his return, on April 5, that *Pravda* published Andreeva's denunciation of Nina Andreeva's letter. Though "there are no prohibited topics today," he stated, "the Andreeva letter is an attempt little by little to reverse party decisions." The Politburo reprimanded Ligachev, who thereafter declined in influence, and Yakovlev, now the most radical reformer, emerged as the principal party figure in charge of ideology and the media. More importantly, Gorbachev had broken with his more conservative associate and signaled a sharp turn toward a more democratic politics.

Glasnost, the policy of permitting greater freedom of expression, had the effect of liberating the elements of civil society that had been developing during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods. From the Soviet media came a barrage of historical documentaries and discussions of the Stalin era, as the party reformers attempted to demonstrate how Stalinism had been a distortion of the original and, in their view, authentic Leninist form of socialism. Every night television shed light on the dark secrets of the Soviet past—the executions of thousands in death camps in Belorussia, the famine of the 1930s in Ukraine, the "secret protocol"

attached to the Nazi-Soviet Pact that allowed the annexation of the Baltic republics. The questioning of the most basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism, and even the role of Lenin and the meaning of the October Revolution, shook the confidence of many Communists and opened the way for even more penetrating analyses of the roots of the present social crisis. An economist spoke of the Soviet people as being "like a seriously ill man who, after a long time in bed, takes his first step with the greatest difficulty and finds, to his horror, that he has almost forgotten how to walk." Viewers watched intently in late May 1988 as American president Ronald Reagan made his first visit to the "evil empire" and warmly embraced Gorbachev. The old enemy was gone, the sense of threat from the outside world dissipated, and along with it much of the justification for unquestioning allegiance to the existing regime. The critique and exposure of the past and present operation of the Soviet system wore away at the popular support of the party, its leadership (including Gorbachev eventually), and state authority. With the coming of gas, most the number of unofficial and informal organizations multiplied manifold in any large Soviet city dozens, even hundreds, of groups appeared, from democratic socialists to reactionary nationalists, from ethnic fraternities to environmental activists. The official organizations found themselves in an unenviable competition. Membership in the *Komsomol*, for example, declined by 4 million in the first four years of Gorbachev's rule. The genie of social activism was out of the bottle, not to be put back in again for the next decade.

Gorbachev pressured the Communist Party to give up its interference in all aspects of social and economic life. He worked out theses to present to the Nineteenth Party Conference, which would "truly include the broad masses of the working people in the management of all state and public affairs, and to complete the creation of a socialist state based on the rule of law." Specifically, party committees were no longer to be permitted to issue instructions to state and economic agencies or public organizations. The party would cease being the administration of the whole country and be turned into a guiding force. At the same time the party would be democratized on the basis of multiple candidate elections by secret ballot. This meant the end of the *nomenklatura* system of appointments from above. At the same time the authority of the soviets was to be restored. Still faced by the entrenched conservatism in the party apparatus, Gorbachev watched as the local and regional party committees chose well-placed officials rather than the more daring supporters of *perestroika* as their delegates to the upcoming conference. A mood of pessimism and resignation could be felt in the society, and a Western journalist noted that workers in Moscow "don't believe in anything, and they especially don't believe that things will get better."

The Nineteenth Party Conference opened in June 1988 and stunned the public, which for the first time watched internal party discussions on television. Revelations about the depth of the social and economic crises were interspersed with debates that showed real divisions in the party. Speaker after speaker exposed the grinding poverty of the countryside, the inadequacy of school buildings, the deterioration in health and healthcare, and the persistent lying about

achievements. Steadily the mythological underpinnings of Communist Party power fell away. Conservatives, however, did not throw in the towel without a fight. They castigated the press "that destroys, belittles, and throws in the trash our experiences and our past, things sacred to our nation." With enthusiastic applause from the right, one speaker spoke of *perestroika* as "an airplane that has taken off without knowing if there is a landing strip at its destination." Gorbachev defended his view that the old methods would not work, that leaders could no longer bang the table and get results: "If we do not include the people in the processes of management, no administrative apparatus (and ours consists of eighteen million people, and we spend forty billion rubles a year to support it) will be able to cope with it."

The most dramatic moment at the conference came when a repentant Yeltsin stood for political rehabilitation. But he again attacked the privileges of the party elite and called for the removal of those members of the Politburo who had sat there with Brezhnev and "kept silent" during the years of stagnation. Ligachev rose to oppose Yeltsin and, sarcastically referring to him with the familiar "Boris" instead of the polite "Boris Nikolaevich," rejected the claim that top party members enjoyed unwarranted privileges. In the new political environment that was being shaped by television, however, Ligachev's speech had a negative effect on public opinion, while Yeltsin increased his popularity as the most genuine and unambiguous of reformers.

At the very end of the conference Gorbachev made his most radical gesture. He pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and nervously read a resolution to push ahead with his plan for the election of a Congress of People's Deputies, which was to be "the country's supreme body of power." He then called for a vote, and the conference agreed that elections would be held to a new, somewhat democratic structure of soviets and congresses that would exist alongside the Communist Party. Gorbachev's plan to increase the power of elected state institutions at the expense of party bodies was nothing short of a political revolution for the Soviet Union. As they sang the Internationale, many delegates began to wonder what they had done! In fact, they had created a new state structure, headed by the Congress of People's Deputies, that would be the instrument to bring democracy to the USSR and end the party's monopoly of power.

From this moment until the Congress met almost a year later, Gorbachev was at the height of his power, influence, and popularity. The proposal for the elections to a new parliament had been his initiative, not a response to social pressure from below. He was the inspiration and the catalyst that moved *perestroika* from liberalization toward democratization of the system. But already in the borderlands of the Soviet Union this reform from above was being answered by a revolution from below.

THE AWAKENING OF NATIONS

From the time of Khrushchev the Communist Party elites in the non-Russian republics had become entrenched as local centers of power that often