The revolution from below intensified in 1989. Economic conditions worsened for many. The whole country was called upon to help alleviate the suffering of Armenians, who had been devastated by an earthquake on December 7, 1988, in which twenty-five thousand were killed. The earthquake, along with the Chernobyl cleanup, were additional costs to an economy weakened by falling oil prices, but even greater burdens came with the growing social unrest. In July miners went on strike in the Kuznetsk Basin in Siberia and the Donbass in Ukraine, largely over intolerable material conditions. Even soap was unavailable to clean the coal dust off after a shift. This was the first widespread expression of labor's power since the 1920s. Gorbachev hurriedly made concessions to keep this vital source of energy flowing, and in September the Supreme Soviet recognized the right of workers to strike. Gorbachev had hoped to raise the Soviet economic growth rate, which had fallen to almost zero by the late 1970s, up to the level of the 1960s of 5 to 6 percent per year. But the antialcohol campaign removed 25 billion rubles from the legal economy and shifted much of that into bootlegging. After the initial upsurge in economic indicators in 1986, the economy began a rapid spiral downward.

Gorbachev encouraged the introduction of cooperatives, which were collectively owned, and therefore not quite private enterprises, but operated independently of the state. The bureaucracy frustrated and sabotaged the cooperatives at every opportunity, refusing them supplies, financing, and access to foreign currency. The cooperatives that survived had high costs and therefore set high prices for their services and goods. Disgruntled consumers complained about the cooperatives, accusing them of speculation, and the growing criminal element sometimes set fire to the cooperatives or attempted to shake down their owners, who then required the protection of other sinister forces. Gorbachev proposed that party and state leaders plan less but plan better and give up trying to micromanage the system. But his own team of reformers was not sure how far to go. Prime Minister Ryzhkov opposed any movement "beyond the framework of socialism," and Gorbachev himself moved very slowly toward an understanding that a freer pricing system and financial system were required to move the economy from command toward marketization. The party's economic policies remained contradictory and incomplete. Ministries still set control figures and the norms for production, even as enterprises were theoretically supposed to be free to decide what and how to produce. Later Gorbachev recognized that indecision and hesitation in 1987–88, when political and economic conditions were most favorable for reform, "was a strategic miscalculation."

The stagnating economy ate away at the claims by the Communist Party that it was competent to provide for a prosperous future. An ever greater number of people thought of the party powerful as a self-serving, corrupt, incompetent elite. In various parts of the country people turned on local party officials for their privileged access to special stores and better housing. As prosperity and order gave way to material hardships and growing chaos, Gorbachev's popularity eroded, and

approval rating fell from well over 80 percent at the end of 1989 to 56 percent the end of 1990.

THE UNRAVELING OF THE EMPIRE AT HOME

hieby one the nationalist movements in the Soviet Union escalated their demands. May 1989 Lithuania and Estonia declared themselves sovereign republics and laimed that their laws overruled Soviet laws. In July Latvia followed their exam- e. On the fiftieth anniversary of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, August 23, massive monstrations were held throughout the Baltic. The central party authorities ondemned separatist tendencies, declaring that "things have gone too far" in the altic republics, and Gorbachev met with the three Baltic Communist leaders to alm the situation, but he hesitated to initiate a crackdown on the rebellious republics. Two months later, on November 16, the Lithuanian Politburo decided that the arty should be independent of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev was extremely reluctant to use physical force against the population which his own policies had awakened. He told a high-level meeting called to iscuss the nationality question that "we will not depart from the path of solving ll problems by means of political methods, but where the critical nature of the ituation dictates it, where there is a threat to people's lives and safety, we will act ecisively, using the full force of Soviet laws." In answer to calls by non-Russian arty leaders for greater rights for the union republics, national military units, the levation of autonomous republics to union republics, and changes in boundaries, orbachev refused to change the status and borders of national entities. While all ross the Union ethnic conflict erupted and nationalist movements grew tronger, the ruling party stood pat.

In Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the local Communist parties steadily ost authority to nationalists organized in popular fronts. Under pressure from ationalists, the Supreme Soviet in Baku declared Azerbaijan a sovereign socialist tate within the USSR, claiming that that sovereignty extended over Karabakh and Nakhichevan, and spoke of secession from the USSR. Azerbaijani activists marched o the border with Iran, tore down Soviet border posts, and linked up with Azeri ompatriots on the other side. In a country where just a few years earlier an airliner had been shot down for violating the Soviet border, now guards were ordered not to resist as ordinary citizens opened the border on their own. Georgians fought with Abkhazians and Osetins, and both minority nationalities eventually declared their desire to secede from Georgia. Western Ukraine, which had never fully acquiesced to Soviet rule, became a center for separatist nationalism. In early September a Ukrainian nationalist organization, Rukh (Movement), was founded in Kiev, but Ukraine, the second most populous Soviet republic, was not united around a nationalist agenda. Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians retained an identity with the Soviet Union. In neighboring Moldavia violence broke up the November celebration of the revolution in Kishinev, and both Turkic

and Slavic peoples within the republic looked toward the central Soviet government to protect them against the more nationalist Moldavians.

SURRENDERING STALIN'S EMPIRE

Reformers in Eastern Europe watched the events in Moscow attentively. The Soviet Union was the major conservative force in the Soviet bloc, along with East Germany, preventing reform in the Eastern European economies and societies since the Prague Spring of 1968. In his very first days in office, indeed, at the time of Chernenko's funeral in March 1985, Gorbachev had made it clear to the Communist leaders of Eastern Europe that the Brezhnev Doctrine, that the USSR would intervene to save the present regimes in Eastern Europe, was no longer Soviet policy. For East German Communists particularly this shift signaled disaster, for it meant that the USSR was no longer committed as firmly to a separate socialist Germany. With the new political thaw in the USSR, East European Communists began to shift toward reform. In 1988 the Hungarians retired their long-time party boss, Janos Kadar, the heir to the Soviet suppression of the 1956 revolution. At the beginning of 1989 they legalized freedom of assembly and association and a multiparty system, and on March 3 Gorbachev sanctioned the new political system in Hungary. By spring demonstrators in Budapest were calling for free elections and the withdrawal of Soviet troops. In early May the barbed wire that separated Hungary and Austria was removed, and the border was opened for free transit to the West. No reaction came from the Soviet Union as hundreds of East Germans used the Hungarian border crossings as an escape hatch to the West. In Poland military dictator General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who had cracked down on the mass democratic movement, Solidarity, nine years earlier, opened a dialogue with the opposition, and in February 1989 roundtable talks were held between the Communists and Solidarity, which led to free elections on June 4. Solidarity swept the elections, and the Communists were exposed as an unpopular minority party. In August the Soviet Defense Council ordered its troops in Eastern Europe not to interfere in domestic conflicts, and Gorbachev telephoned the leader of the Communist Party in Poland and urged him to join a coalition government with Solidarity. The Communists were basically told to relinquish their power to their political rivals without a fight. Given the stark choice of conceding to the democratization of Eastern Europe or using the military, Gorbachev chose not to use force. The days of the Soviet Union's empire in Eastern Europe were numbered.

The radical shifts in Eastern Europe were officially sanctioned by Gorbachev first when he visited West Germany in June and answered a question about the possibility of bringing down the Berlin Wall by saying, "Nothing is eternal in this world." But much more dramatic was his visit on October 6 to East Germany for its fortieth anniversary. Even as he embraced the leaders of the socialist Germany, Gorbachev made it clear that the Soviet Union would not back up the German regime with troops. Crowds shouted, "Freedom, freedom! Gorby! Gorby! Help us!" The day after he left, fifty thousand Germans demonstrated in Leipzig against the regime. Soviet troops were ordered to stay in their barracks. Party leader Erich Honecker ordered his troops to fire on the crowds, but the conductor Kurt Masur intervened and prevented violence. By October 18 Honecker had fallen, and on November 9 the Berlin Wall was dismantled by crowds of ordinary people. Gorbachev, who had urged reforms in the GDR that its leaders had been reluctant to implement, was reported to have said, "Life punishes latecomers."

One by one the East European Communist regimes were replaced by coalition or even non-Communist governments. On Christmas Day 1989 the ruthless dictator of Rumania, Nicolae Ceaucescu, was overthrown and executed. The major dividing issue remaining in Europe was the question of the two German states. Gorbachev had long insisted that the West would have to accept the division of Germany, but, according to his foreign policy advisor, the general secretary "was already convinced that without a resolution of the Germany question ... no reconciliation would occur in Europe or the world." The Soviet leader saw West Germany as its "main partner in the building of a new Europe." Still, it was not until a year after the collapse of the Eastern European Communist governments in the fall of 1989, an event that changed completely the post–World War II political settlement, that Soviet leaders consented to a united Germany.

Gorbachev probably did not anticipate that the East European regimes would collapse so quickly or that socialism would be so rapidly abandoned in favor of Western-style market capitalism. The precipitous rush from the Soviet model was a body blow to the historical justifications for socialism in the Soviet Union. Though many of the original rebels against the Communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe were, in fact, socialists who were seeking some third way between American-style capitalism and Soviet-style state socialism, the enthusiasm for the market economy overwhelmed that alternative in the immediate aftermath of the "velvet revolutions" in Eastern Europe. Only a few years later would more moderate reformers, and even former Communists, be returned to power in Hungary, Poland, and elsewhere as the original bloom of excitement over the market economy faded.

Gorbachev's foreign policy revolution radically changed the nature of the international political system. No longer a superpower, the Soviet Union quickly lost its military and political influence in the world. In the West pundits spoke of the USSR as having lost the Cold War, but in large part the Soviets simply lost in 1989 what they had won in World War II. Their empire in Eastern Europe was gone, and Germany once again a strong, united state in central Europe. Gorbachev withdrew Soviet troops from Afghanistan and restored ties with China in 1989, after more than thirty years of hostility between the two countries. The USSR was no longer able economically or militarily to project its power in the Third World. Its clients in the Middle East had no recourse but to recognize the increased power of the United States or risk isolation or defeat. In his last year in power Gorbachev attempted to mediate the conflict between the United States and Iraq over Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, but by that time Soviet influence was at a low ebb, and the

dispute would be settled by a stunning show of American military might in early 1991. Gorbachev's achievements in bringing the Cold War and the division of Europe to an end were recognized when he was rewarded with the Nobel Prize for peace in 1990. There were no prizes, however, for his progressive weakening of the USSR and his ultimate failure to hold together the country he ruled.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Though he could still rely on the traditional loyalty and obedience that party members showed their general secretary, Gorbachev had moved far away from the majority opinion in the party. He and his closest associates represented a radical minority view within the party. By November 1989 he publicly gave up the idea that Marxism held a monopoly on truth. Without abandoning socialism, he said, "We no longer think that we are the best and that we are always right, that those who disagree with us are our enemies." On his way to an audience with Pope John Paul II, he sanctioned the idea of tolerance for religion: "Faith is a matter of conscience for each person and something in which no one should interfere." At a summit of the Warsaw Pact he repudiated the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and put the USSR on record in favor of political rather than military means for dealing with problems in Eastern Europe. He could see that events were overtaking the party and that the apparatchiki were preventing the party from leading the reform movement, but he continued to believe that the party "could be renewed." He was careful not to move too far ahead of the other party leaders, which would have led to a mutiny in the Central Committee and his dismissal, but at the same time he steadily worked at weakening party power and shifting authority to the new state institutions.

The election of the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet radically shifted power at the top of the state structure from the party to the state and gave Gorbachev, now chairman of both, a new base of power outside the party. But the old institutions of party control still remained very influential both in the ministries, the army, and the police and outside of Moscow in the regions and republics. The old power structure still had to be dismantled, and resistance to the further reduction of party power grew among party leaders. The prime minister, Ryzhkov, gravitated toward the more conservative Ligachev, while the more radical democratic forces, clustering around Yeltsin, pushed for more rapid reform. By the second half of 1989 the forces favoring radical change within the Soviet Union had far outstripped the more cautious Gorbachev. Desperately trying to hold a centrist position between radicals and conservatives, he swung back and forth from one side to the other, alienating each in turn. The radicals in the party raised the issue of Article 6 of the Soviet constitution, which stated, "The leading and guiding force of Soviet society and the nucleus of its political system, of all state organizations and public organizations, is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union." But Gorbachev, apparently fearful of a reaction from the conservative majority in the Central Committee, hesitated, even though political pluralism already existed in the Soviet Union. Article 6 became a symbolic issue of enormous importance, and Gorbachev's opposition to its removal, which he later defended as necessary maneuvering in the face of the conservative opposition in the party, alienated the liberals. One of his most determined critics, urging radicalization of perestroika, was academician Andrei Sakharov, who was gearing up for the battle with Gorbachev when, on December 14, 1989, he suffered a fatal heart attack. Less than two months later the general secretary came out for eliminating Article 6, moved up the date for the next party congress, and arranged for real elections of officials within the party. On February 7 the Central Committee renounced the party's monopoly on power. A new political arena had been created in which political organizations and parties could freely compete with the Communists for political power, for the first time since the days of the civil war.

By January 1990 Gorbachev was a fireman rushing from one conflagration to the next. Television viewers watched as he stood in the streets of Vilnius, Lithuania, surrounded by a quarter of a million people, and tried, and failed, to convince the Lithuanians that it was to their advantage not to declare independence from the Soviet Union. Before the Lithuanian crisis had settled down, Azerbaijanis in Baku began attacking and killing Armenians. After some hesitation, Gorbachev sent troops to restore order in Baku and to prevent the popular front there from increasing its power. Bloody fighting ensued; hundreds were killed, and Azerbaijanis turned decisively against the central Soviet regime.

Gorbachev was the head of a party-state that was a kind of grand coalition that uneasily included reformers who looked ahead to a multiparty socialist democracy, a multinational federation of republics with greater local control, and a Communist Party that would look more like the social democratic parties out of which Bolshevism grew, and conservatives who wanted preservation of the Communist Party as the unchallenged leading force in the country, a centralized union of subordinate republics, and tighter control over the instruments of information. But unlike the most radical democrats, Gorbachev was not prepared to give up on socialism or the Communist Party or to allow separation of the non-Russian republics from the Soviet Union. "Our ideal is a humane, democratic socialism," he told the Central Committee in February 1990. "We remain committed to the choice made in October 1917." The Communist Party would compete in the new multiparty political arena for the position of ruling party. One emboldened conservative hinted broadly that Gorbachev should be removed: "Someone should answer, comrades, for the breakdown of party unity and for ideological failures; someone should answer, comrades, for the events in Eastern Europe." From the other extreme, Yeltsin attacked Gorbachev for not going far enough fast enough and voted alone against his proposals.

No longer reliable allies for Gorbachev, the self-styled "democratic" forces had moved beyond reform within the system to a call for the abolition of the system itself. They abandoned Gorbachev for Yeltsin, and the democrats and the nationalists together, particularly in the Baltic republics, combined ideas of anti-Communism with support for independence of the republics. On February 25, 1990,

demonstrations in support of the democratic opposition were held throughout the country. About one hundred thousand people marched in Moscow, with smaller numbers in Kiev, Tbilisi, Minsk, and Tashkent. As elections to local Soviets proceeded throughout the country, Communists were defeated almost everywhere. In Leningrad the opposition won 60 percent of the seats. On March 11 the newly elected parliament of Lithuania, led by the popular front called Sajudis, declared Lithuania an independent state and elected an intransigent nationalist, Vytautas Landsbergis, president of the country. Gorbachev sent KGB troops to Vilnius and imposed economic sanctions, cutting off oil and gas to the republic, but rejected calls from the old-style Communists to use force to overthrow the new government. When the Lithuanian parliament suspended its declaration of independence in June, Moscow lifted the economic embargo. But a nervous stalemate kept tensions high for the next year.

As the Union unraveled, Gorbachev tried to strengthen the new elected institutions in the center. The Congress of People's Deputies elected Gorbachev as the first (and, as it turned out, the last) president of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev chose not to be elected directly by the people of the USSR, though he would probably have won such an election, because of the urgent need for an executive authority. The decision to forego a popular election would later return to haunt the new president, for it meant that he did not gain his legitimacy from the people directly but from a Communist-dominated institution. On May Day, as Kremlin leaders stood on Lenin's mausoleum watching the parade, Gorbachev experienced a humiliating affirmation that people now felt themselves freer in the Soviet Union. Crowds jeered and shouted at those on Lenin's tomb, carried placards equating the Soviet party chiefs with the deposed and murdered Ceausescu of Rumania, and waved portraits of their new heroes, Sakharov and Yeltsin.

As Gorbachev's popularity declined, that of Boris Yeltsin increased. Yeltsin's popular touch, his image as an opponent (and victim) of the Communist conservatives, his commitment to even more radical reform than Gorbachev, and his identification with the Russian republic all served to secure a power base for his political comeback. While Gorbachev was consolidating his formal power in the state institutions at the level of the Soviet Union, Yeltsin gained institutional power at the level of the Russian Federation. Both the all-Soviet and the RSFSR state institutions had been equally formal, symbolic, and ceremonial, the rubber stamps of the Communist Party. Now that Gorbachev's policies had breathed life back into them, state institutions at the republic level became potential competitors of all-union institutions for the mantle and power of the moribund Communist Party. When Gorbachev became president of the Soviet Union, leaders in the union republics demanded that presidencies be created in their republics as well. In their bid for power non-Russian nationalists declared their nations' sovereignty at the expense of the Soviet Union. The governments of the republics, several of which were being reelected in relatively democratic elections, fought a war of laws with the Soviet center. In March 1990 Yeltsin was elected to the RSFSR Congress of People's Deputies, and at the end of May he was narrowly elected its chairman.

He declared that Russia would soon declare its "real sovereignty." "If the center does not overthrow us in the next 100 days," he said, challenging the all-Union leaders, "then grounding ourselves on the declaration [of sovereignty] ... Russia will be independent in everything. Russian laws will be higher than union ones." Yeltsin had shrewdly adopted as his platform the defense of the Russian republic, adopting the more benign forms of Russian nationalism to the democratic cause and providing the democrats with a broader base of support than they had hitherto enjoyed. Two weeks later the Russian parliament overwhelmingly proclaimed the sovereignty of the republic. In June, at the Twenty-Eighth (and last) Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Yeltsin dramatically resigned from the severely weakened and divided Communist Party and walked out of the Congress. While Gorbachev cobbled together new institutions to recreate a looser, more democratic Soviet federation and tried to keep the party unified, Yeltsin strode confidently toward another future, still uncharted, but now he was free of identification with the Communist Party or socialism.

In the summer of 1990 the democratic opposition acquired its own program of reform, a plan proposed by Stanislav Shatalin for radical economic reform within 500 days. The Shatalin plan, which aimed at privatizing large parts of the state economy by selling off assets to ordinary Soviet citizens, became the basis for a brief political alliance in late July between Gorbachev and Yeltsin. But feeling pressure from conservatives within the government and fearful that he could not convince the Supreme Soviet to pass the Shatalin plan, Gorbachev retreated, moderating the plan by borrowing ideas from an alternative offered by his prime minister, Ryzhkov. The Supreme Soviet, instead of adopting the Shatalin plan, granted Gorbachev emergency economic powers. The president, in turn, gutted the 500-day program, continued to rely on the old administrative system, and put forward a much more moderate variant of a market reform. Gorbachev's successful strategy of broad coalition building in his early years in power was no longer appropriate as the country polarized. By siding with the conservatives and breaking with the democrats, he made what was arguably his most fatal political error. His tactical accommodation with the "forces of order" was a blow to the democrats that convinced many of them that compromise with Gorbachev and his socialist program was impossible. The Soviet economy could not simply be reformed; it had to be replaced.

THE FINAL CRISIS

Responding to the fears of the army and state officials that the country was disintegrating, Gorbachev brought more conservatives into his inner circle and lost several of his reformist allies, most notably Yakovlev and Shevardnadze. While he had managed progressively to weaken the central party bodies, reducing the number of departments and personnel in the Secretariat and holding less frequent meetings of the Politburo, he was not successful in creating authoritative state institutions to replace them. He formed an advisory body, the President's Council,

which began to act effectively, but in December he replaced it with a new Council of the Federation that was to have policymaking powers, along with a Cabinet of Ministers, and a consultative Security Council. But these new structures were little more than cosmetic and could not prevent the rapid erosion of the Kremlin's authority. Presidential decrees were not enforced, young men resisted the draft, and local officials paid less and less attention to Moscow. The Politburo was now made up, not of the most important officials in the center, but of the first secretaries of the various Communist parties in the republics, and the Council of the Federation was likewise made up of the heads of state of the fifteen republics, along with Gorbachev. A vacuum had been created at the center, and both the party and the Union were on their way to becoming de facto confederations.

Two major issues confronted Soviet leaders in 1990–91—reviving the economy and keeping the Union together. Increasingly these two issues were considered closely intertwined. Not only nationalists but many Communists in the republics had come to believe that they could handle economic questions better than the center and that independence would open the way to economic progress. Yeltsin declared, "The so-called revolution from above has ended. The Kremlin is no longer the initiator of the country's renewal or an active champion of the new. The processes of renewal, blocked at the level of the center, have moved to the republics." From the other side Prime Minister Ryzhkov worried that an "undeclared war" against government had been unleashed, which aimed "to strike a blow at the state, at the sociopolitical system, and to crush it once and for all." The war is being waged "under the flag of the market." The government, he went on, is in favor of sovereignty for the republics, but also the sovereignty of the Union as a whole. Gorbachev's strategy for recreating a "firm power" was to propose a popular referendum on a Union of sovereign states, which would have a new division of authority but be "a single state nevertheless."

As he allied himself with the forces suspicious of further reform, Gorbachev lost one of his most dedicated supporters, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze. On December 20 Shevardnadze publicly resigned his post to protest against the "dictatorship" that was coming and the resurgence of the militantly antireformist forces. His prediction that sinister forces were on the march seemed to be confirmed by signs of more aggressive activity by the party conservatives in the Baltic region. On January 8, 1991, workers marched to the Lithuanian parliament to protest price hikes and demand the resignation of the government. Water cannons dispersed the crowds. Gorbachev called on Lithuania to restore the full force of the USSR and Lithuanian SSR constitutions, but President Landsbergis refused to restore what he labeled the "constitution of invaders" and called for civil disobedience. A pro-Soviet minority movement called for direct presidential rule of Lithuania, and on January 11 Soviet MVD troops opened fire on a crowd in Vilnius, killing fourteen people and wounding hundreds. On January 16–17 tensions led to shooting in Riga, Latvia, where five people were killed. In Moscow tens of thousands rallied in the center of the city to protest what looked like a determined attempt to crush the democratic movement in the Baltic republics.

Gorbachev responded to the Baltic crisis with regret, but he argued that the clashes were the result of intransigence on the part of the Lithuanians. However, he ordered that no troops engage in unauthorized activity and that no one be allowed to appeal to the armed forces in the political struggle. And again he refused suggestions from party conservatives that he impose presidential rule. Defiantly, the Lithuanians overwhelmingly voted on February 19 for an independent and democratic republic.

Gorbachev's inconsistent and halfhearted crackdowns—sending troops here and there, censoring television programs, ordering soldiers and police to patrol certain cities—not only did not calm the situation but increased popular hostility to his continued rule. By March 1991 a stalemate had been reached: those around Yeltsin wanted more rapid democratization and marketization; the party conservatives wanted a retreat to law and order; and Gorbachev wanted gradual, controlled movement forward. Gorbachev tried to achieve consensus on the union treaty as a necessary first step toward economic revival. On March 17 a referendum was held throughout the Soviet Union on the question "Do you consider necessary the preservation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics, in which the rights and freedom of an individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?" Over 80 percent of the Soviet adult population voted, and 76.4 percent came out for the Union. In the nine republics that participated in the vote, all returned a large majority in favor of maintaining the Union. Six republics (Armenia, Georgia, Moldavia, and the Baltic republics) refused to participate. Russia and others added other questions to the referendum. Though support for Yeltsin was strong in Russia, where his proposal for an elected presidency passed overwhelmingly (70 percent), Gorbachev could be satisfied with a slightly larger Russian vote for the Union (71 percent). The greatest support for the Union came from the countryside and the more conservative republics in Central Asia, the least from the largest cities—Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev. But now Gorbachev could argue that he had a mandate for reforming the USSR as a free association of sovereign republics.

The crisis intensified in April. As Yeltsin won new powers in the Russian republic, Gorbachev reconsidered his strategy. His turn to the right had effectively restrained the "forces of order" for five months but had not halted the drift toward independence in the Baltics, South Caucasia, and Moldavia. A choice had to be made between armed force and a complete break with the democrats, on one hand, and accommodation and negotiation with the popular forces, on the other. Now, with the democrats more popular than ever, Gorbachev shifted once again. On April 23 he met with Yeltsin and the leaders of eight other republics at a dacha at Novo-Ogarevo and hastily worked out an agreement to finalize the draft of the union treaty, prepare a constitution for the union of sovereign states within six months after the signing of the treaty, and carry out new elections for the union political bodies. No overthrow of elected bodies was to be tolerated; the role of union republics was to be radically enhanced, and the center would be reduced to an executive dependent on the wills and revenues of the republics.

Both the drafting of the union treaty and the referendum indicated that the Soviet Union had divided into two parts: the six independence-minded republics for whom no form of union was acceptable and the Muslim–Slavic majority that had voted for union, though the form was yet to be decided. At Novo-Ogarevo Gorbachev had essentially agreed to recognize the sovereignty of all union republics and the right of those who wished to opt out of the union to do so. Though he still faced significant opposition from conservatives, who feared that the union treaty conceded far too much power to the republics, Gorbachev managed to tame resistance to the treaty in the USSR Supreme Soviet and to force through a social democratic platform in the party's Central Committee.

Ostensibly allies once again, Gorbachev and Yeltsin were in fact rivals for power with contrasting visions of the new union of republics. While Gorbachev spoke of strong republics and a strong union, Yeltsin and his allies pushed hard for stronger republics and a weaker union. On June 12 Yeltsin triumphed in the popular elections for president of the RSFSR, winning 57 percent of the vote. Russia now became symbolically linked, along with the Baltic republics, to more determined democratic and market-oriented reform. The promotion of Russian statehood was based on a concept of Russia as a multinational federation, rather than on an ethnic Russian nationalism. As the movement for a sovereign Russian state grew, however, it adopted symbols of the old Russia—the tricolor flag and the double-headed eagle of the tsarist monarchy. Russian leaders spoke of bringing Russia back into the mainstream of civilization and to continue its modernization in a more humane, democratic form. Russian statehood had displaced the Soviet center as the principal vehicle of democratic reform.

On July 11 the USSR Congress of People's Deputies approved the general conception of the new Union Treaty. A Union of Soviet Sovereign States made up of sovereign states and itself sovereign was projected. Even though the word "socialist" had been voted on as part of the name of the new union in the March referendum, because many republics had given up the word, it was dropped in the interests of unity. Five days later, however, the leader of Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk, warned that Ukraine would not let this opportunity to establish its statehood slip by and therefore would delay its decision on signing the Union Treaty. The treaty, he stated, did not conform to the idea of state sovereignty, and although 26 million people in Ukraine had voted for preserving the Union, they did not vote for this treaty. Yeltsin as well continued to ask for changes to the treaty, escalating his demands from meeting to meeting.

Though some of his closest allies, such as Yakovlev, tried to convince Gorbachev to give up on the Communist Party and the idea of socialism, the general secretary refused. Instead, he convinced the Central Committee in July 1991 to adopt a new program that was essentially social democratic. He now advocated a notion of "market socialism" and planned in private to push for a split in the party at the forthcoming party congress scheduled for November. Convinced that he had tamed the Communist Party and that a renewed party could be used as an instrument for the renewal of the country, and certain that he had saved what

he could of the Union, Gorbachev set a date, August 21, for the formal signing of the union treaty and left for vacation in Crimea. But three days before that, on Sunday, August 18, a group of conservative Communist leaders, calling themselves the State Committee for the Emergency (GKChP), ordered Gorbachev's arrest and sent tanks into the streets of Moscow.

COUP AND COLLAPSE

The coup against Gorbachev and Yeltsin was led by several of the conservative Communists whom Gorbachev had trusted and appointed to office, including his vice president (Yanaev), the prime minister (Pavlov), the defense minister (Yazov), the interior minister (Pugo), the head of the KGB (Kriuchkov), and his own chief of staff (Boldin). All over the world people watched the broadcasts of the Cable News Network (CNN) for the next three days to follow the fate of the Soviet Union. Tanks were stationed in the center of Moscow, newspapers were disciplined or closed, and the coup leaders went on television to explain that they had been forced to take action because Gorbachev was ill and incapacitated and the country had to be saved. Some leaders in the republics went along with the coup. In Azerbaijan, Belorussia, and Uzbekistan local Communists backed the GKChP. Georgia's president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, equivocated and made an agreement with the local Soviet commander. But in Armenia Levon Ter Petrosian prepared for resistance, in Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbaev declared the

Figure 19.2 Yeltsin defending the White House during the 1991 Coup (RIA Novosti).

coup unconstitutional, and in Kyrgyzstan Askar Akaev said that the republic would follow the path of sovereignty no matter what and took measures against the local Communist Party. Estonia and Latvia declared themselves independent. On the day after the coup failed, the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet voted to hold a referendum on the question of secession. On August 27 Moldova (formerly Moldavia) declared itself an independent state. "The center," Armenia's Ter Petrosian said, "has committed suicide."

In Moscow Yeltsin slipped away from the men sent to detain him, made his way to the White House, the Russian parliament building, in the center of the city, and mounted a bold and courageous defense of democracy. The coup leaders hesitated to attack the crowds around the White House, and the soldiers, even the KGB elite units, declined to fire on the demonstrators. Gorbachev, kept relatively isolated in his Crimean home, refused to capitulate to his captors or sanction the coup. By August 21 the coup leaders had given up, and an exhausted Gorbachev returned to the capital. But the sinister plot of the drunken adventurers had completely transformed the political scene. When Gorbachev emerged in the evening of August 22 to give a press conference, he continued to talk as if the party could be saved and as if socialism were a viable political alternative, apparently without realizing that in the eyes of the public both the Communist Party and its ideology had been completely discredited. When he finally visited the Russian parliament, Yeltsin's stronghold, he was treated with disrespect, humiliated by Yeltsin, and taunted by the deputies. Under pressure from Yeltsin, Gorbachev, who clung to the "socialist choice," agreed reluctantly to the dissolution of the Communist Party. In a stroke he lost one of his principal institutional bases of power.

Yeltsin, strengthened by his defiant resistance to the coup plotters and by the fact that he was the legitimate and popularly elected president of the RSFSR, emerged as the strongest political figure in the country, while Gorbachev was isolated in the Kremlin. The institutions that had constituted the Soviet center—the Communist Party, the state bureaucracy, the army, and the police—were all suspect, and the victorious democrats swiftly dismantled what they could. Yeltsin declared all property of the Communist Party, worth billions of dollars, to be RSFSR state property, and began taking over the institutions of the moribund Soviet Union. Gorbachev met with Yeltsin and the leaders of ten other union republics the day after his return to Moscow, and they agreed that the Congress of People's Deputies, the supreme legislative body of the Soviet Union, should be dissolved and that supreme power in the country during the transition period would devolve to a State Council made up of the leaders of the union republics and a newly elected Supreme Soviet. Both conservatives and reformers protested dissolving the Congress, while the radicals applauded it and looked forward to a looser commonwealth of sovereign states. By dissolving the Congress Gorbachev eliminated one more base of his power. Essentially, on September 5 the old Soviet Union died, but it was not buried for a few months, as Gorbachev tried in vain to create new interconnective tissues among the republics.

The weakness of many of the republics, most importantly in Central Asia and South Caucasia, and the economic dependence of the periphery on the center allowed the drift to full separation for a time. A statement by Yeltsin's press officer about rethinking the borders between the Russian republic and its neighbors with Russian subpopulations sent a collective shiver through the republics, particularly in Ukraine and Kazakhstan, and forced a retreat to the pragmatic recognition of all existing borders. The newly formed State Council's first decision was to recognize the independence of the three Baltic republics. The republics of Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine declared independence, or at least the intention of becoming independent. Gorbachev worked tirelessly to rebuild the central institutions of the Union, but each time he seemed to secure an agreement, it soon unraveled.

At the same time Yeltsin was trying to get his house in order. His government intended to carry out radical economic reforms once plans to "finish demolishing" the center had been completed. Step by step Yeltsin abolished or emasculated the union ministries. At the beginning of November the Russian Congress of People's Deputies granted Yeltsin extraordinary powers to create a stronger state and accelerate reforms. Many feared that the centrifugal forces that had pulled the Soviet Union apart would do the same with the Russian Federation.

Yeltsin created his own governing team, led by Gennadii Burbulis, a representative from Yeltsin's hometown, Sverdlovsk; Egor Gaidar, an economist; and the diplomat Andrei Kozyrev, the foreign minister of Russia. Their program was to complete the destruction of the totalitarian state system, to destroy the power of the Communist nomenklatura, and to institute a market economy. This revolutionary course was popular among some intellectuals and the public in the largest Russian cities, though far less widely supported outside of the capitals. Opposition began forming almost immediately, and by December Yeltsin's vice president, Aleksandr Rutskoi, began speaking out against the planned freeing of prices.

From late August to late December 1991, two competing governments existed in Moscow. The one led by Gorbachev slowly evaporated, as the movement for independence in the republics sapped the strength of the center. The other government, led by Yeltsin, swelled with new powers, sucking the sense out of an all-union government. Many in the West, including President George H. W. Bush, hoped desperately that some form of union might be preserved. At the same time they identified Yeltsin as the most reliable democratic and market-oriented politician. For most ordinary Russians, however, Yeltsin's appeal came, not from his shift toward democracy and the market, but from his image as a man of the people and his strong will.

The end for the Union came in December. On the first of the month voters in Ukraine elected the former boss of the Communist Party, Leonid Kravchuk, as president of the republic and overwhelmingly approved independence. Kravchuk opposed Gorbachev's plans for a new union, and by this vote the resurrection of the Union became impossible. A week later, at a closed meeting in Khrushchev's old hunting lodge in Belovezhskaia Pushcha, Belorus, Yeltsin and Kravchuk met

with the Belorussian leader, Stanislav Shushkevich, and the three heads of state agreed to terminate the USSR and form a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). When informed of the decision, Gorbachev was shocked: "They had already decided everything and they had support—they had spoken with [President George H. W.] Bush. I said, that's a disgrace, an outrage. You've talked with the President of the United States, but you didn't consult the President of the USSR."

The dismantling of the Union was now unstoppable. The Central Asian republics, which had been left out of the decision to form the Commonwealth, agreed to join the CIS, and on December 21 eleven republics (the Baltic states and Georgia did not attend) issued a statement in Alma-Ata: "With the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the USSR ceases to exist." It only remained for Gorbachev to address the television audience on December 25 and formally resign as president of a country that no longer existed. Now triumphant, having vanquished his political foe, Yeltsin spoke of Gorbachev in the past tense: "He thought he could unite the impossible: communism with the market, ownership by the people with private ownership, a multiparty system with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. These are impossible unions. But he wanted to achieve them, and this was his basic strategic mistake."

The death of the Soviet Union in its seventy-fourth year represented a failure of Gorbachev's attempt to manage a triple reform of democratization, economic transformation, and decolonization of the non-Russian republics. The system was simply not equipped to dismantle all at once, and at a late date, the old practices of command in the economic and political spheres and to construct a democratic multinational federation. Had reform begun earlier, or economic conditions been more fortuitous, or the reforms been carried out sequentially, as in China, with economic changes preceding political changes, rather than happening simultaneously, perhaps perestroika might have had a different outcome. The Soviet system had weathered far worse crises in the past than it faced in the late 1980s, but once a program of liberalization had been initiated from above, it moved quickly out of the control of its initiators. Gorbachev's project of reform from above prompted a series of national movements from below. As several republics went their own way, Gorbachev's "socialist choice" and supranational ideology evaporated—the victim of economic collapse, the dissolution of state authority, and the rise of powerful nationalisms and ambitious local elites.

The great achievement of the Soviet experiment was the rough modernization of a backward, agrarian society. Soviet power industrialized, urbanized, and educated a mass society through the exercise of state power on a mobilized population. But social and economic modernization resulted in an incompletely modern society. The modernity achieved by 1985 did not include democratic institutions, a legally sanctioned civil society, the rule of law, or a consumer-driven economy—all of which had become part of the universal definition of modernity by the end of the twentieth century. Gorbachev's reforms attempted to remove the most oppressive aspects of the Soviet system and move it toward democracy, and in this

sense Yeltsin was Gorbachev's heir. Much of the raw material for a liberated society and democratic state was available at the end of the Soviet period, but the great problem was "getting there from here." Russians and non-Russians proved to be better at tearing down old edifices than at building new ones. The blueprints they chose came from the West. In this sense most of the educated and political elite had already turned toward a Western notion of modernity. But the open questions were whether they would successfully use their skills and talents to build a modern democratic society and whether what they built would be for the fortunate few or the great many.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

The literature on the Gorbachev period is already very large. One might begin with the excellent analysis by Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford, 1996). See also Ben Eklof, *Soviet Briefing: Gorbachev and the Reform Period* (Boulder, CO, 1989); Isaac J. Tarasulo (ed.), *Perils of Perestroika: Viewpoints from the Soviet Press, 1989–1991* (Wilmington, DE, 1992); Mikhail S. Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York, 1988); Stephen White, *Gorbachev and After*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, 1992); Seweryn Bialer (ed.), *Inside Gorbachev's Russia: Politics, Society, and Nationality* (Boulder, CO, 1989); Richard Sakwa, *Gorbachev and His Reforms 1985–1990* (London, 1990); Harley D. Balzer (ed.), *Five Years That Shook the World: Gorbachev's Unfinished Revolution* (Boulder, CO, 1991); Abraham Brumberg (ed.), *Chronicle of a Revolution: A Western-Soviet Inquiry into Perestroika* (New York, 1990); and Jerry F. Hough, *Democratization and Revolution in the USSR, 1985–1991* (Washington, DC, 1997).

On Soviet society and economy during the Gorbachev period, see Stephen Kotkin, *Steeltown USSR: Soviet Society in the Gorbachev Era* (Berkeley, CA, 1991); Mary Buckley (ed.), *Perestroika and Soviet Women* (Cambridge, 1992); R. W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution* (Bloomington, IN, 1989); Ellen Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York, 1988); Geoffrey Hosking, *The Awakening of the Soviet Union* (London, 1990); Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power: The Post-Stalin Era* (Princeton, NJ, 1990); Murray Feshbach and Albert Friendly, Jr., *Ecocide in the USSR* (New York, 1993); Ed A. Hewett, *Reforming the Soviet Economy: Equality Versus Efficiency* (Washington, DC, 1988); Anders Aslund, *Gorbachev's Struggle for Economic Reform* (Ithaca, NY, 1989); Jessica Allina-Pisano, *The Post-Soviet Potemkin Village: Politics and Property Rights in the Black Earth* (Cambridge, 2008); and Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation During Perestroika* (Ithaca, NY, 1997).

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