



Policy Study No. 94

A Year in the Life of Glasnost

The Hugh Seton-Watson Memorial Lecture
and other essays



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Note. *The Centre for Policy Studies never expresses a corporate view in any of its publications. Contributions are chosen for their independence of thought and cogency of argument.*

Preface

In the summer of 1987, the Centre for Policy Studies held a conference on 'Change in the USSR'. Four distinguished students of Soviet affairs – Dr Iain Elliot, Dr Dominic Lieven, Dr Antony Polonsky and Dr George Urban – sat on the panel; Lord Thomas of Swynnerton, chairman of the CPS and author of the recent *Armed Truce* which recounted the history of the early years of the Cold War, was in the chair. The speakers talked of the realities and of the limitations of glasnost, of the opportunities and risks of perestroika. Their mood was a balance of welcome and caution. All agreed that change was in the wind, and that the West needed to redouble its efforts to understand it. But the dangers were great.

Wishing to take these deliberations further, the Centre decided, in the autumn of last year, to invite Dr Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security adviser to President Carter, to deliver the first of the Hugh Seton-Watson Memorial Lectures.

Here it should be said that the idea of inaugurating these annual lectures came, after the sadly early death of that most admired, perceptive and original of historians, from amongst his friends and colleagues who meet regularly in the Soviet Affairs Group of the Centre for Policy Studies.

Dr Brzezinski duly came to London on 19 January, and gave his lecture to an invited audience of some 250 people interested in the conduct of our foreign affairs. It now forms Part 1 of this paper, which, like the lecture itself, is dedicated to the memory of Hugh Seton-Watson. Part 2 consists of the four interventions of last year's conferences, reconsidered and partly revised in the light of subsequent events.

Let us hope that the exhortation of Dr Brzezinski to those of us on this side of the Atlantic to look to the cultivation of a Central Europe which may be about to cast off – or at least to loosen – its Soviet shackles and rejoin the comity of European nations, will be heeded. Why rely for ever on the power and munificence of the United States?

DIRECTOR OF PUBLICATIONS

PART I

From Eastern Europe back to Central Europe

Dr Zbigniew Brzezinski

I AM HERE TO PAY TRIBUTE TO A GREAT HISTORIAN. I do so as a student of politics; but also as an occasional practitioner with a special interest – geopolitical as well as personal – in the region which commanded Hugh Seton-Watson's special interest, and I daresay also his personal affection. An affection, I must add, which was reciprocated by the very great warmth of admiration for Hugh amongst that region's scholars.

To-night I wish to focus on the proper political place and political future of that region which lies between Germany and Russia: hence the maybe mystifying subtitle of my talk, 'From Eastern Europe back to Central Europe'. In focusing on the political dimension, I hope not to trespass on the old debate about the correct cultural-historical identification of the region which we have all become accustomed to calling Eastern Europe.

This debate has, it is true, been waged with intellectual vigour by many historians as far back as the 1920s. The distinguished Yale historian, Piotr Wandycz (a great admirer, by the way, of the works of Hugh Seton-Watson), recently recounted the debates waged at the fifth International Congress of Historians, held in 1923 in Brussels, and at the Seventh Congress held in Warsaw in 1933, over the proper historical definition of the region east of Germany and west of Russia. It was recognised that a new reality had emerged as a consequence of World War One. Scholars had to probe more deeply into a question which had also agitated the politicians; was that reality of several independent states something artificial, or was it authentically grounded in history? To most historians of the region the answer had been clear. The region represents a distinctive part of Europe. It is European. Yet it fits neatly neither into Europe's East nor its West.

That historical perspective has been echoed by many of those who partake of the region's cultural contribution. In recent

years both Milan Kundera and Czeslaw Milosz, have eloquently stressed the unique cultural identity of a region whose boundaries cannot be precisely fixed but over which, more often than not, forces from the East and West have brutally collided. The tragic consequences of that collision have given the region a peculiar, metaphysical character based on a community of suffering (which in turn has preoccupied its writers, poets and thinkers with a sense of the absurdity of life as well as with the mystery of humanness). Enough here to evoke the names of Kafka, Bruno Schlotz – who is just being discovered – and Mrozek in order to grasp the central dimension of the tragic and the absurd in the daily life of the region.

In the era of mass executions, purges and the holocaust that tragic absurdity has been suffused with transcendental pain. Its social impact was poignantly expressed by yet another of the region's tribunes, Mircea Eliade, who noted that it was the special fate of millions of central Europeans to discover through the mortifying but also cleansing experience of imprisonment, torture, and suffering, a redeeming spiritual quality.

I have said that my interest in the region is more directly political and contemporary – though I am well aware that political apprehensions are profoundly influenced by these historical and cultural underpinnings.

My political thesis can be stated very directly. It is that the contemporary political notion of east Europe is the product of Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam. That is, it is the consequence of the political arrangement that reflected the power realities of the mid-1940s. It produced a condition in which there were, indeed, only two Europes – Western Europe and Eastern Europe. That condition has endured for some four decades. It has been perpetuated by the East-West struggle for the future of Europe, which in turn has made the division of Europe into the Eastern and Western halves all the sharper and more dramatic. Each half has been tied and subordinated to a non-European power. The dominant reality defining that division has been the confrontation between the United States, itself a cultural and democratic extension of Western Europe, and the Soviet Union, which is, in geography and in other ways, an Eastern European state (though culturally much influenced by its long exposure to oriental despotic traditions). This condition is now gradually

coming to an end. We are witnesses to an important piece of history – the revival of the authentic and distinctive personality of a major part of Europe. This is a process which surely warrants the use, in cultural, historical and political language, of the term ‘Central Europe’.

How is this happening, and what might be the policy implications of this very important process? Our point of departure for answering these questions has to be the recognition that two key facts have determined the last forty years of that region’s history. The first is that communism was imposed upon it from outside by a politically and culturally alien formation, by the Soviet Union, where Marxism had been adapted to special, distinctive conditions of oriental despotism, and thence was grafted by force on societies with altogether different political notions, different religious and cultural traditions, and a different sense of subjective self-identification. The second is that the dominant nation was viewed by the subordinated nations as culturally inferior, thus precipitating a retrogressive subjugation. Here, in my judgement, is a most important contrast between the experience of the Soviet empire and that of, say, the French and British empires. In these latter cases there was some sense, even within the subjugated peoples, that the dominant nation possessed values and a culture with which the subordinate one wished to identify itself. This varies from empire to empire, but the *mission civilatrice* was not phoney. Sangore’s appreciation of French literature is but one example of the impact of French culture, projected by French power, in a relationship of imperial subjugation. None of that is true *vis-a-vis* Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. I leave aside whether the lack of any sense of cultural inferiority – or indeed the sense of cultural superiority – by the subordinated peoples towards the Russians is objectively justified. There is, of course, some irony in the notion that a Polish peasant should view as culturally inferior the people who produced Tolstoy and Dostoyevski. But that is irrelevant. The fact is that they do feel that way. The average inhabitant of the region felt that domination by Moscow represented domination by a source of cultural inferiority – and was historically retrogressive.

These conditions, then, shape the reality of Eastern Europe over forty years: the imposition of an alien doctrine originated

in Western Europe, redefined in the Russian context, and grafted by force on East European societies in altogether different cultural and political conditions – in a setting of real or imagined cultural superiority on the part of the peoples subordinated to the dominant nation. Why were both these very important handicaps to Soviet imperial sway obscured by the understandable desire of the population for rapid social and economic recovery? They were obscured by the mirage of catching up with the West, which was one of the major claims of the new Communist regimes – which held that within a brief period Poland or Czechoslovakia would outstrip, for example, Great Britain in industrial development and in general modernisation. They were also obscured by reverence of Soviet power, which was very real in the wake of the defeat of Nazi Germany, and even by a kind of perverse admiration for Stalin's personal power.

Those who have read and still recall what was written in *The Captive Mind* by Czeslaw Milosz will immediately know what I am trying to convey by these rather brief, capsulated statements defining a subjective attitude of East Europeans towards Soviet power in the early phases of the imposition of communism.

All that is now gone. Recovery has not closed the gap with the West, and everybody in the region knows that. The Soviet Union, moreover, is now seen as a stagnant, uncreative system, unable to cast off its Stalinist veneer and its deeply rooted Stalinist system, although still striving to preserve what is now in effect a 'co-stagnation sphere' in Eastern Europe. The technological gap of the Soviet Union, especially in comparison with the United States and Japan, has had a devastating impact on the notion throughout the region, as well as the world, that the Soviet system has discovered the key to social innovation and that it represents the wave of the future.

The greatest impact of all of these changes has been felt and has manifested itself in Poland. I think it is fair to say that Solidarity, while having lost the tactical battle for organisational freedom, in fact won the strategic struggle for societal self-emancipation. Solidarity was tactically defeated in the political context, but it has prevailed at the historical and cultural levels. In Poland today, it is true, the Communist system still rules, but it is unable either to indoctrinate or to reconstruct society in

its own image. Ultimately, the essence of Communism is a transformation of the subjective and objective conditions of the society subject to the Communist political system. In Poland today, the Communist Government still governs, but it is unable either to indoctrinate or to reconstruct. On the contrary, on the social level there is now widespread evidence, almost routine manifestations, of the revival of authentic political life in Poland.

Here, we come to a new condition. Part of the essence of Communist rule – of its totalitarian self-expression – is not only the suppression but the elimination of any independent political thought, especially of any independent political dialogue that needs social interaction; and that in effect is the beginning of the political process. Today in Poland you have a genuine political life on the societal level. Not, it is true, in the sense of anything we expect from an open, institutionalised, constitutionally governed body politic; but nonetheless, a political life on the societal level involving a dialogue, the exchange of views, the articulation of alternative liberal programmes, social democratic programmes, conservative programmes, and even very right-wing nationalist programmes as an alternative to the ruling regime.

All this is expressed in wide-ranging publications – newspapers, books, magazines – published underground but operating on the semi-surface, in effect testifying to the emergency of a *de facto* political opposition as a normal condition of life, although the political opposition cannot yet claim any such thing. But it exists, and postulates something about the future. It is clear, and the public opinion polls show it, that by and large Communism in Poland is discredited. The Communist élite is either isolated or is gradually being co-opted to the more enduring national values. In that sense, culture and history have already been recaptured by the authentic national personality.

This is taking place in a setting of massive economic stagnation and growing economic crisis. Barring a return to terror, which I think is unlikely, or a massive social explosion, which is quite possible, followed by Soviet intervention, which is not to be ruled out, continued decay and a gradual transformation into a pluralist system (or something like one) is possible. And all of this is dominated by a growing desire to be part of an authentic Europe. The problem for Moscow is

accentuated by growing regional unrest of which Poland may be the spearhead, but by no means the solitary example.

In effect, throughout the region, we are witnesses to the phenomenon of the organic rejection by the social system of an alien transplant. That is what has historically happened in Eastern Europe. The alien system, grafted on by force from outside, is being repudiated by the social organism. This process manifests itself on the economic and political planes, and the combination of the two is particularly destabilising. The region, as a whole, is experiencing today both political liberalisation and economic retrogression, a classic formula, as we know, for revolution.

There is a revival of political life in Hungary, too. It is not as extensive as in Poland, but is ever more manifest. Even the head of the People's Patriotic Front in Hungary, a Communist mass organisation, has recently spoken in terms of the eventual need for formal opposition parties, and has acknowledged that the current monopolistic rule by the Communist Party may have to be viewed as a transitional phase. The revival is widespread, activated by dissidents and magazines. It is the beginning of a political dialogue in Hungary of the kind that was crushed by force barely thirty years ago.

More timid manifestations of the same process are beginning to surface in Czechoslovakia, a country which became a political cemetery for twenty years since 1968, but which is undergoing again a political revival. One need only refer to a very remarkable interview granted by Dubcek to *L'Unita*, which reads like nothing less than a political manifesto, raising again the banner of the Prague Spring. Manifestations on the streets of Prague have again taken place. There is a revival of the dialogue. In a strange statement, which must have been encouraging to the Czech dissidents, when Gorbachev visited Prague in April, his principal spokesman, Gennadi Gerasimov, was asked at an open press conference, attended by Communist and non-Communist journalists what in his view was the difference between Dubcek and Gorbachev. The amazing answer was confined to two words, 'nineteen years'. I take that to mean that Gerasimov was simply saying that Dubcek was premature. He was not saying that he was wrong, or that he was a revisionist or a traitor, which was what the Czech leaders had said.

Then there is the growing unrest in Roumania, a country in which there is no authentic political dialogue, only mounting and bitter social resentment against unbelievable poverty and deprivation reminiscent of World War Two – and also against a personality cult of unique vulgarity. Hardly a stable condition. Here is a Communist regime which has degenerated into a familiar type of 'kinship dictatorship' which reminds us of President Marcos and his distinguished spouse.

The regional plot is compounded by ever-bolder dissident activities, not seen for forty years. There are joint statements, joint regional meetings of dissidents. The unrest in East Germany in 1953 was confined to that country. Again, the events of 1956 were simultaneous in Poland and Hungary, but had no communion. The Prague Spring of 1968 was an isolated phenomenon. And when Polish workers were shot down in Gdansk in 1970 Poland was the sole focus of unrest. But now – *sub rosa* regional meetings, joint declarations, and even open meetings are being held.

And the economic conditions are becoming ever more serious. They are deteriorating to such an extent that in a recent analysis in the *New York Times* it was stated: 'While the newly industrialised countries of the third world are building factories with the most advanced technology, Eastern Europe is increasingly a museum of the early industrial age. Eastern Europe is rapidly becoming part of the third world, and many third world countries are surpassing it economically.'

In addition, Eastern Europe is now heavily indebted. We all know how indebted Poland is, but the case in other Eastern European countries is almost as bad. The Hungarian indebtedness has reached a level of \$2,000 per caput, the highest in the world.

How soon and in what form will the zone of economic stagnation and political unrest become the zone of revolution? Indeed, it is not inappropriate to pose the historically pregnant question of whether the year 1988 might not be about to see the new Spring of Nations in Europe, a parallel to 1848. It is not an exaggeration to affirm that there are five countries now in Eastern Europe all of which are ripe for revolutionary explosion. Nor is it an exaggeration to say that this could happen in more than one simultaneously. Nobody could predict this with any degree

of certainty – it may not happen at all – but the preconditions, objective and subjective, are certainly there.

This poses a great dilemma for the Kremlin. A military intervention to crush any such outbreak would certainly mean the end of perestroika in the Soviet Union. It would put an end to chances of any sort of renewal or modernisation. It could adversely affect some of the key political players in the Kremlin. It is striking that today, in response to these developments, the Kremlin is placing less and less emphasis, publicly and privately, on ideological homogeneity and ideological orthodoxy in the bloc, and more and more on the reciprocal benefits of economic cooperation and continued links in the field of security. In effect, we are seeing in their reaction a defensive readjustment; and an attempt to structure the relationship on the foundation of an enhanced common interest rather than on the hierarchy of subordination and a system of ideological orthodoxy. It is doubtful whether this will be enough to cope with the mounting desire of the region to be once again a genuine part of Europe – and no longer to be submerged as an East Europe, with its political and even its cultural centre located in Moscow.

The implications are far-reaching. The competition for the future of Europe, under way now for some forty years, is shifting away from the political defence of Europe against Soviet domination, towards the problematics of the survival of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe. This is a geo-political and historic shift of some dimensions. During the 1950s and even the 1960s, the Soviet Union and its Communist parties in Western Europe represented a genuine threat west of the Elbe. The Communist parties in a number of West European countries were potent political forces, with the potential for an increasing appeal, and the Soviet Union itself enjoyed some historical prestige, as well as some sense that it was riding the wave of the future. We should not forget how optimistic Khrushchev was in 1960, when he not only categorically predicted, but had his prediction explicitly inscribed in the official Communist Party programme, that by 1970 the Soviet Union would be the No. 1 industrial power in the world. That is a prediction, a laughable one perhaps, which has been excised from the newly revised Communist Party programme.

The Soviet empire is clearly on the defensive. Eastern

Europe is stirring and redefining itself as central Europe. Today the average Czechoslovakian, Hungarian or Pole openly professes that he feels closer to the typical Austrian, even German, and certainly Frenchman than to his eastern neighbours. The very notion of Moscow as the region's cultural capital, once an idea openly propagated by Soviet spokesmen, now generates derisive scorn from the region's intellectual community.

Indeed I think it is correct to affirm that not only is Eastern Europe entering a phase of systemic crisis, but so is the Soviet Union itself. The fate of perestroika is, beyond doubt, most uncertain. My own judgement is that its prospects are less favourable than the prospects for successful economic change in China. The Chinese programme of reform seems to me to be more ambitious, better designed, and grounded in more favourable social, economic, and cultural settings than the Soviet programme. There is in China a societal capacity to use the reforms for economic advantage. These conditions, in my opinion, are lacking in the Soviet Union. This is why, in a recent major report to the President of the United States a group of strategists, of whom I was one, concluded that by the year 2010 it is very likely that a profound transformation in the global economic hierarchy will take place. Instead of seeing Khrushchev's prediction come true, the United States will still be in first place – but followed by China, which in turn will be only slightly ahead of Japan. The Soviet Union will be in fourth place – distinctly behind. If these prognoses have any merit, they obviously foretell a dramatic change in the position of the Soviet Union, not only in its relationship to Eastern Europe but also to the world at large.

I believe that the solution to that dilemma will not be easily found, and that perestroika might well not be the solution. The ultimate weakness of the Soviet Union (and therefore of the perestroika programme) is rooted in the fact that it is a multinational empire. The decentralisation of a multinational empire leads to the dissolution of the empire itself, a condition which does not exist in the Chinese case.

All of that, in any case, means that we are in the beginning phase of a protracted period of internal uncertainty so far as the Soviet Union is concerned. For the foreseeable future, the Soviet

Union is going to be essentially a one-dimensional rival in the military domain. It will be a rival that should not be underestimated, for its capacity for the projection and development of military power, and for effective societal mobilisation, remains enormous. Beyond that dimension, it will not be a major power. It has lost already the ideological and economic competition which provides the underpinning for the cultural and political competition around the world.

This may increase the Soviet temptation to play the German card, but also, I suspect, it reduces the force of that card. If the Soviet Union were to play the card in order to exploit and stimulate increased German neutralism, and thereby obtain large-scale economic assistance as well as political benefits in the West, it would be doing so in a context in which its hold on Eastern Europe, as the Soviets see it, will be automatically diminished. Given the weakness of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the economic and political weakness of the Soviet Union itself, and the emergence of a quasi-neutral Germany on the basis of a grand manoeuvre, it could at the same time create conditions for the more rapid dismantling of the Soviet empire, stimulating in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary the desire for an equally neutral status. Without direct control of East Germany, control over this fermenting region will be all the more difficult. That imposes a major limitation on the Soviet capacity to play the grand hand on the German issue.

For the West, for you here and for us across the ocean, I think this does create a historical setting for enlightened policies on the East-West issue. I do not believe for a minute that a massive revolutionary outbreak in the region is in our interest. Were that to occur in the foreseeable future, I still believe, despite what Mr Dubcek has said in his recent interview, that the Soviet Union would have no choice but to intervene. It is almost equally certain that the West would impotently stand by, and that reform in the region and perestroika in the Soviet Union would be the victims. Thus, I do not believe that an explosion is something which we should be fomenting, or simply waiting for, or welcoming. Gradual change, I think, is desirable. It should be encouraged. It should be facilitated, and it is feasible.

Our strategic and historical goal should not be the absorption of what was once called Eastern Europe into what is

still called Western Europe. But the progressive emergence of a truly independent, culturally authentic, perhaps *de facto* neutral central Europe is a goal which I think is both obtainable and worthy. When I say *de facto* neutral, I mean mainly neutral in substance but not neutral in form. This would emerge in the context of the continued existence of the alliance systems that define the geo-political reality of contemporary Europe. If this is to take place, it has to be deliberately promoted by the encouragement of political change, by the sustaining of political resistance, and by the promotion of an ever-larger political dialogue within the East.

I tend to wonder, as an American of European extraction, why there is no European equivalent of the National Endowment for Democracy that exists today in the United States. I happen to be one of its directors. It is an operation not of enormous size, but exists on a scale of several millions of dollars. It has been very actively engaged in supporting the emergence of a constructive political dialogue in central Europe, even in Russia. We do this out of a sense of obligation to our common historical destiny. Why is there no Western European equivalent of such an initiative? Why should it be the task of Americans in America to nurture freedom of thought and to encourage a free political dialogue in central Europe? After all, human rights is our most appealing platform. We do live in an age in which the quest for human rights has become the genuine historical inevitability of our times, and the promotion of human rights should not be an almost solitarily American undertaking.

It is also desirable to promote more extensive East-West economic contacts. Given the likelihood of an economic crisis in the East, I think it is not impossible to take advantage of these circumstances through the expansion of such contacts to increase the range of societal independence; to institutionalise diversity of social and political behaviour, especially if there is a deliberate will in the West to do so, through engagement to promote systemic change.

Beyond that, it is not impossible to use conventional arms control for intelligence, military, and political purposes. I think it is quite likely that in the foreseeable future the Soviet Union will try to exploit the INF Agreement to promote extensive East-West negotiations for the liquidation of all battlefield nuclear

weapons in Europe. This would have the effect of denuclearising Western Europe and of promoting a nuclear-free zone in the West, a long-standing Soviet objective. Why not anticipate this and meet it on equally appealing political grounds by focusing public attention through proposals in the area of conventional arms, aiming at the thin-out and eventual removal from Central Europe of main battlefield tanks? Most Europeans have some sense of what the tank represents. Some have experienced it themselves, and others remember it vividly. It is a military fact that a thin-out of tanks, not to speak of their ultimate removal from certain regions of Europe, would greatly reduce the capacity of the Soviet Union for offensive military operations. But it would also create a sense within central Europe that the retraction of Soviet military power is beginning to take place. The notion of a 'tank-free zone' in Europe could be an appealing response to the deceptive and destabilising Soviet promotion of nuclear-free zones in Europe. That, it seems to me, would also contribute to the emergence of a larger and more authentic Europe – one composed as was ancient Gaul of three parts, Western Europe, Central Europe, and Eastern Europe.

I happen to believe that such an initiative would be more constructive both in its military and political dimensions than even the forthcoming START Agreement, regarding which some question marks need to be raised.

There is a real danger in our haste that we will have an agreement which is deficient in verifiability, strategic stability, and deterrent credibility. In the area of conventional arms in Europe, we are able to undertake initiatives which may help to stabilize the military, while improving the political, situation both in central Europe and even within our home electorate.

Last but not least, I hope that I have implied that it is time for our Governments to consult quietly in order to develop contingency plans for the possible crisis in Eastern Europe, to use that old geographical term. If there are indeed soon to be major eruptions or if there is indeed a new Spring of Nations in central Europe, let us not be caught by surprise. Let us be ready with proposals designed to diminish the Soviet temptation to repeat the Russian performance of 1848, 1956, or 1968, thereby shaping the new situation more in keeping with the realities and the dynamics that I have tried to sketch out.

Finally, Hugh Seton-Watson wrote not long before his untimely death: 'Let us stop thinking of the Soviet colonial empire as permanent, and stop speaking of the EEC's neo-Carolingian empire as Europe. There is nothing warmongering or sacriligious about these small changes in vocabulary. The European cultural community includes the peoples living beyond Germany and Italy, and this is something which we should never forget, something in no way annulled by the fact that they cannot today belong to an all-European economic or political community. This is all the more reason for promoting, and for making the best possible use of, every sort of cultural contact with them that offers itself and to show constantly that we recognise them as fellow Europeans.'

PART II

1

A land fit for liberals?

Dr Iain Elliot

ONE SENSATIONAL GORBACHEV SPEECH FOLLOWS ANOTHER, and every time the same questions are heard. Can he succeed? Will his changes be irreversible? What does it mean for Soviet relations with the rest of the world? No sooner has Mikhail Gorbachev concluded the INF agreement in Washington than he approaches the Chinese leadership to suggest a summit in Peking, attempting to heal the rift between the communist superpowers. Meanwhile in Moscow crowds queue to see the documentary film 'More Light' with its more honest assessment of the suffering endured by the nations of the USSR in the seventy years of communist rule. For those accustomed to the slow pace of the Brezhnev era, the speed with which new diplomatic overtures follow each other, and subjects once taboo arise in open discussion, creates an impression of radical reform. But that impression could prove to be profoundly misleading for the politicians and public of Western countries.

Gorbachev adds to this confusion by calling his changes 'revolutionary', but he is actually closer to the traditions of the reforming tsars. Alexander II abolished serfdom, extended the franchise, and reformed the judicial system; there was a moral incentive to do so, but it was the economic imperative following Russia's dismal performance in the Crimean war that was uppermost. Today too the USSR must measure progress on a world yardstick, competing with the West and Japan. And both liberals and reactionaries agree that Soviet society simply cannot continue as before.

Russia is a land of extremes in which liberals have traditionally fared badly. The Great Reforms were followed by years of reaction under Alexander III. The 'freest country in the world' declared by the 1917 Provisional Government lasted only a few months, under assault from right and left. Lenin's New Economic Policy gave way to Stalin's terror, Khrushchev's

de-Stalinisation to Brezhnev's clamp-down, the Kosygin reforms to economic stagnation. Again the West is delighted to see liberal thinkers gain some prominence in Moscow, but how much power do they have in the Kremlin? The Aganbegyans and Zaslavskayas, whose radical views are now to the fore, kept their heads down during the Brezhnev era when others whose ideas they shared, such as Ivan Khudenko, died in prison. (See *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 1 April 1987.) Were the political climate to change for the worse, they would probably disappear quietly back to their Siberian research institutes.

For Soviet politicians, culture can be a useful weapon against rivals, to be discarded when no longer required. Khrushchev published Solzhenitsyn, but allowed the persecution of Pasternak and that more recent winner of the Nobel prize, the Leningrad poet Joseph Brodsky. Both were recently published in the main Soviet literary monthly *Novy Mir*. Will the Gorbachev era prove an exception, permitting a new blossoming of the arts, free from censorship? As yet the liberal changes actually pushed through, as opposed to those promised, have not surpassed changes under Khrushchev, and the danger of reversal remains as great.

Moreover, a more liberal appearance in domestic policies has not in the past meant a less aggressive foreign policy, although occasionally bringing a temporary lull. Russia expanded under both liberal and reactionary tsars. Khrushchev had his Hungary and Cuba, while Gorbachev has his long and reluctant withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Soviet leaders still base their legitimacy on the premise that they are leading the world to a better, communist future. But Gorbachev is no fool; he clearly realises that there are many more viable paths to a better life which some people now under communist rule would wish to try, were they granted the opportunity. The USSR still depends on compulsion, rather than the free choice of its component nations, for its cohesion.

The lack of security at the top set definite limits on reform. Despite the promotion of his supporters to the Politburo and Secretariat, Gorbachev cannot afford to disregard the potential for opposition within the leadership. Even the remaining Brezhnevites must accept the need to reinvigorate the economy, but if Gorbachev's radical proposals fail to prove effective, there

will be others willing to lead a more orthodox approach to stimulating economic growth. The dramatic fall of Boris Yeltsin, regarded as a close supporter of the Gorbachev reforms, and the subsequent chorus of neo-Stalinist attacks on him (see *Pravda* 13 November 1987) demonstrates that reformers must proceed slowly and cautiously. Yet Gorbachev himself has emphasised that delay means failure. The writer Anatoli Strelyani told his audience at Moscow University in May 1987 that democracy and a free press were vital for reform to succeed, and this required a bold leap: 'You cannot cross an abyss in two hops .. gradualness is the greatest danger to perestroika... Gorbachev is slow in expanding the social base for perestroika, and this will lead to the defeat of our cause and of Gorbachev himself'. Strelyani was removed from his post on the editorial board of *Novy Mir*.

Egor Ligachev is credited with ending the attack on *nomenklatura* privileges (see *Pravda*, 13 February 1986), and, according to Nikolai Shmelev, found his article in *Novy Mir* (No. 6, June 1987) so 'harmful' (*vrednaya*) that he phoned to complain about the publication of Shmelev's radical ideas for economic reform. (See the *Guardian* 24 June 1987.) Ligachev has warned that democratisation does not mean political pluralism, and emphasises that 'profound restructuring in no way signifies the break up of our political system'. (See *Soviet Analyst*, Vol.16, No 5.) Another Politburo member, the KGB chief Viktor Chebrikov, attacks those who attempt 'to split the monolithic unity of party and people and install political and ideological pluralism'. He deplores the fact that a 'certain proportion of the Soviet people are infected with the virus of nationalism' and criticises intellectuals who indulge in 'carping, demagogy, nihilism, blackening certain stages in our historical development' (*Pravda* 11 September 1987).

Electoral changes may give the population a greater feeling of involvement by allowing them to choose between two approved candidates in elections to the soviets. But could a tractor driver be allowed to win even a sizeable minority vote when standing against a member of the Politburo? If party secretaries were to compete for their posts in the republics in elections which were even semi-free, there would be a danger that few Russians would be chosen. Nationalist demonstrations in Kazakhstan in December 1986 and in the Baltic republics (June

and August 1987) show the strength of anti-Russian feeling while the Azeri – Armenian clashes in February and March 1988 demonstrate what deep-rooted ethnic animosities can emerge when the reins of power slacken.

What do the Gorbachev changes signify? There has been an impressive, rapid turnover in the leadership. But all new leaders follow this course, and Gorbachev was helped by the great age of leadership under Brezhnev. Andrei Gromyko was moved from the post of foreign minister to that of President without any democratic consultation of public opinion. The unceremonious ousting of Yeltsin seemed in particular a setback for the cause of reform.

Gorbachev's new style has won him deserved admiration. But that is no reason to conclude that his determination to pursue traditional CPSU aims is any less; perhaps he merely has a more realistic assessment of present Soviet capabilities.

Ideology is now apparently less significant in policy decisions. But some basis for unity is needed, both within the party, and to justify the merging of so many disparate nations and cultures. Without the aim of building world communism, what is left? Only the dismal record of previous Soviet administrations – as repeatedly confirmed by Gorbachev himself.

Perestroika requires much more enthusiastic participation by the population – the alienated intellectuals and the passive, but unco-operative, workers and peasants. So far the anti-drink campaign and emphasis on quality control in the factories, necessary though they clearly are, seem to be alienating the workers rather than winning their support, while the new glasnost, so popular with intellectuals, encourages them to demand even more freedom. The vast army of bureaucrats resents the threat of unemployment, while the military opposes efforts to remove priorities in resources and skilled manpower.

Glasnost has certainly great advantages for Gorbachev's reforms, both internal and external. As did Khrushchev, Gorbachev is using the media to combat opposition in the apparatus. Glasnost has stimulated a more honest assessment of Soviet society, and wins admiration in the West. On some subjects, especially economic, the debate is genuine and helps to stimulate the positive changes the leadership wants.

Neither we, nor Gorbachev himself, can know how far he

can go. But certain limitations seem likely. Time is not on his side. The economic reforms will take years to bring benefits to the population. The 1987 economic growth figures were disappointingly low. Allowing some private enterprise in the service sector and encouraging initiative at the local level in industrial enterprises should help, but such improvements take time to spread and show results. Now he can blame Brezhnev; but what excuse will he have in five, ten years time?

Many political prisoners have returned from labour camps and Siberian exile. Detention of sane, but awkward individuals in psychiatric hospitals is openly criticised in the press. The dividing line between dissidents and 'within system' reformers was always blurred; now it is not realistic to see them as two separate groups. Uncensored *samizdat* journals are springing up in Moscow, Leningrad and other cities. But there are attacks on them in *Pravda*, and police have disrupted several unofficial meetings and protest demonstrations.

Pluralism does not seem part of Gorbachev's reforms, and sooner or later it will be necessary to crush the most ambitious reformers to preserve party control. The regime cannot permit full freedom, for example, to the editors of the new journals *Glasnost* and *Referendum* to expand their activities, or allow Paruir Airikyan's Armenian nationalist party to promote its demands for a referendum on secession from the USSR, especially since similar groups exist in the Ukraine and the Baltic states also.

Rapid economic growth requires all the benefits of modern information retrieval and international travel for study, conferences and consultations. Again this challenges party control, threatening a boom in *samizdat* distribution – and a brain-drain to make Britain's one seem the tiniest of drips. In 1987 the numbers of Soviet citizens allowed to emigrate increased (some 8,000 Jews, 14,000 ethnic Germans, and 6-7,000 Armenians) but this was far below the peak year of 1979 (62,000) and represents only a small fraction of those who wish to leave. There has been some discussion of the internal restrictions on travel, with *Izvestia* (7 and 23 September 1987) criticising the passport regime, but all Soviet citizens must still win the approval of the authorities before changing their place of residence.

Democratisation must likewise be strictly limited.

Multicandidate elections, for example, even under party control, could result in unacceptable 'localism' especially in the republics (unless so rigged as to become insignificant).

Clearly the West should encourage the positive trends in the USSR. But what exactly does this mean in practice? It is risky in arms reduction, trade, COCOM etc, while doubts still remain about the true extent of the changes. Much can be done, however, through Western broadcasting services which can point out to Soviet citizens the limits to glasnost in reporting world affairs. Educating the Western public about the actual achievements of the Gorbachev regime is almost more difficult. Exaggerating their significance is perhaps the most dangerous present form of the 'Soviet threat'; in the democracies public opinion can be misled, as is evident in several major public opinion polls in Europe comparing what people think of Soviet and US policies.

This brief discussion of what seem to me the practical limitations on Gorbachev's attempts to reform the Soviet system without replacing it, does not mean that I regard his changes as purely cosmetic. Returning briefly to the Soviet Union in March 1988, I was saddened not to see more evidence of improvements in living standards – especially after three years which had brought such dramatic changes for the better in the way that the fundamental problems which beset Soviet society were being discussed more honestly than ever before. Yet I was impressed by the courage of both those in official positions, and those whose dissidence was formerly regarded as criminal activity, who are now openly advocating further change towards a more open society. I was told that people were now more aware of their civic responsibilities, and that widespread improvements in attitudes to individual rights would not easily be reversed.

Mikhail Gorbachev is not alone in perceiving the need for more sensible policies at home and abroad; he has the support of thousands of Soviet citizens, many of whom are prepared to take considerable risks to push the limits of reform. His true allies are those who were critical of the faults of Soviet society before it was fashionable to be so, and who now offer constructive criticism, rather than unthinking admiration for the attempts being made to redress the wrongs of the past and build a better future.

The enemies within

Dr Dominic Lieven

IT IS NOT TOO DIFFICULT TO PINPOINT the motives underlying Gorbachev's programme of reform in the USSR. Until the early 1970s Soviet leaders could convince themselves that history was on their side. The USSR, it could be imagined, was catching up with its Western rivals and competitors. In the crudest measurement of national status and pride, namely military might, it had already done so. The sight of a retreating post-Vietnam USA only strengthened a sense that genuine equality was a possibility of our times, with a future predominance of Soviet power in key regions of the world by no means inconceivable.

A decade later such illusions, which had in any case derived largely from the Soviet leadership having been too tired, too parochial and too wilfully ill-informed to understand what was going on both in its own society and the outside world, were no longer tenable. Events in Afghanistan illustrated the limitations of military power as a means of influence in the modern era. Worse still, the economic gap between the USSR and the world's most advanced capitalist countries was seen to be widening rapidly in the later 1970s and 1980s.

History was threatening to leave socialism behind. The longer term implications of this trend were (and are) alarming for the Soviet leadership for many reasons. First, but not foremost, there is the problem of defence. We may perhaps be facing the beginnings of a shift in military technology in which relatively cheap and crude weapons of mass destruction will be replaced by an armoury which includes defensive systems of hideous complexity and expense. The burdens of such a shift on the Soviet economy would be very heavy. Secondly comes the price of empire. Given economic backwardness, not only will the USSR find it impossible to expand its influence worldwide, it will not even be able indefinitely to bail out such expensive clients as Vietnam, Cuba and Afghanistan. With increasingly dire economic problems in Eastern Europe likely

soon to contribute to political crisis there, the price of empire even close to home also seems set to rise. As most empires learn, political stability in client states must sometimes be purchased dearly. Thirdly, persistent economic failure seriously weakens the regime's legitimacy, the self-esteem and self-confidence of its élites, and the relationship between the Russian and non-Russian halves of the Soviet population. Ever since Khrushchev proclaimed the decline of peaceful co-existence, socialism has been supposed to triumph because of the obvious superiority of its economic system and of the levels of welfare, culture and social harmony which it can sustain. Some of the present Soviet leadership are educated and cosmopolitan enough to make realistic comparisons between their own society and foreign ones in a way that has not been the case since 1917. Such comparisons must offend both their self-esteem and their patriotism. In the longer run the leadership must also know that economic failures will deepen disputes between the USSR's various nationalities on how to divide a shrinking cake, and undermine the appeal of Soviet national pride among the increasingly sophisticated younger generation in the non-Russian republics.

Moreover, for the leadership, economic failure is not just a long-term but an immediate and pressing threat. The catastrophic state of many health and welfare services has both direct and subtle effects on labour productivity. The economy's continuing failure to meet elementary consumer demands results not only in disastrously low productivity and morale but also in corruption and a vast illegal black market. Sloth, corruption and privilege among officialdom, which under Brezhnev visibly infected the top leadership itself, further undermined the party's prestige and its ability to mobilise people's energies. The gap between propaganda and reality ensured that cynicism and alienation took deep root in the younger generation in the 1970s. To the credit of the Soviet political élite, it recognised many of these realities and, in Mikhail Gorbachev, chose a leader willing, at least in part, to tackle them, even at the price of wrecking the careers, reputations and comfortable lives of much of the élite itself. A Soviet optimist might assert that the Gorbachev 'revolution' shows that his country's rulers are still motivated by sufficient patriotism, 'party-spirit', or maybe merely concern for efficiency and self-esteem, to challenge sloth, corruption and

individual self-interest within their own ranks. A pessimist might respond that it is one thing to appeal to a group of officials to attack the records and occupy the posts of their predecessors, quite another to persuade the newcomers to accept either personal self-sacrifice or, still more, fundamental changes in the workings of the system. Probably, however, both optimist and pessimist would concur that Mikhail Gorbachev is an impressive leader, worthy of respect; he combines patriotism, energy and political skill. Nor should his capacity to learn be underrated. Clearly he realises now that discipline on its own is an insufficient remedy for the USSR's problems. Although the programme of reforms he has set out is designed above all to increase Soviet power, prestige, pride and prosperity, the methods he advocates do promise greater freedom and wealth for the ordinary Soviet man and woman.

Few onlookers on Soviet affairs would, however, doubt that the obstacles facing Gorbachev are immense. Indeed a sense of just how hard it may be to surmount these barriers is a major theme running through the comments of all the contributors to this work. Like most other political leaders, Gorbachev must ultimately justify his policies by their success, yet it is by no means clear that the marriage of socialist and capitalist principles (which is the most he can attempt in the economic sphere) can be consummated. As Antony Polonsky points out, Eastern European precedents are not encouraging. Nor indeed are Soviet ones, the 1965 Kosygin reforms showing how cautious leaders and self-interested officials can puncture attempts to modify the economic system. Although the present leadership sees the necessity of reform more clearly than their counterparts in 1965, evidence is already accumulating that the radical new principles proclaimed in the economic reforms of the last few months are being subverted in the relevant decrees' small print – and probably will be further subverted by officials responsible for their implementation.

Potential opponents of Gorbachev's reforms are not hard to find. The ministerial bureaucracy stands to forfeit much of its power and indeed *raison d'être*. Soviet enterprise managers are liable to react to 'privatisation' like their civil service peers worldwide, especially if, as seems likely, the partial reforms which are promised increase their responsibility for failure,

without relieving them of many production targets and other burdens traditionally imposed on them by the centre. Soviet workers are being asked to work harder and submit to tightened labour discipline, even to accept a degree of temporary unemployment, retraining and enforced mobility. 'Suffer now for a better future' is, however, a familiar cry to which the Soviet worker is unlikely to respond, especially since he has for so long been cocooned against the effect of economic competition, denied the chance to compare his society with other ones and encouraged to believe that his working-class values and customs are inherently virtuous.

Within the élites a sense of the necessity for reform is more likely to be found, yet attitudes towards such changes must be ambiguous. This is particularly the case with the higher party officials, in whose hands the direction of Soviet policy lies. These men's function is to see Soviet problems in their totality, and to frame long-term strategy. Many of them realise that in the long run the legitimacy of the party and their own self-esteem will depend on the success with which they modify the present neo-Stalinist economy and political system to meet the needs of the new era. Moreover Gorbachev's reforms do not challenge the interests, functions and status of the ruling élite to the same extent that they threaten many potentially redundant ministerial officials, enterprise managers or steelworkers. The aim of Gorbachev's policy is after all to consolidate and legitimise the position of the party élite, not to replace or dilute it. Nevertheless even at the top, let alone among lower party *apparatchiki*, men will have to adapt themselves to the challenges of governing in a different manner. Given the absence of terror and the increasing sophistication of Soviet society the party-state élite is in practice no longer omnipotent, as it was in Stalin's day, yet the illusion and claim to omnipotence exists and will be hard to give up. The idea that society has certain legally entrenched rights, certain legitimate areas of autonomy, *vis-à-vis* the state will not be swallowed easily. Moreover the senior *apparatchiki* may well share with the ordinary Russian citizen the sense that new principles are not only unfamiliar and disruptive but also alien, un-Soviet and un-Russian. Allowing the market to determine wealth or status in society, even to a limited degree, may offend party *apparatchik* and worker alike.

It would be a mistake to imagine that opponents of radical reform within the leadership are motivated purely by ideological blinkers, stupidity or self-interest. On the contrary, the further reform is pushed, the more powerful the arguments that conservatives will be able to level against it. As I have suggested, there is no guarantee that 'liberalisation' of the economy will yield results. Even in agriculture, where greater room for personal and family initiative might bring reward most rapidly at least cost, there is room to doubt whether the 'Chinese miracle' can be repeated in the USSR. Decades in which the young, able, ambitious and male have had every incentive and chance to abandon the countryside must have taken their toll. Successful or not, it will carry with it a weakening of political control in ways that the political élite will certainly dislike. One needs to remember that though the Soviet system may be inefficient in economic terms, as a vehicle of political control it is highly effective. This control is valued by the rulers and will not lightly be surrendered.

The nationalities' problem shows how liberalisation and control may be difficult to combine. The fact that half the Soviet population is not Russian by no means threatens the regime's existence. Even in 1917, for all the blunders of the Old Regime's nationalities policy, the fall of the Romanovs owed little to the oppression of the non-Russians, who were divided into too many antagonistic groups too far removed from the geographical centres of power to be a real threat. Nevertheless the fact that their state is only half Russian is something that no Russian government can ever afford to forget. It influences, and generally complicates, every issue they face. Let us for instance take the question of telling the truth about Stalin and his era, which many members of the intelligentsia regard as a touchstone of Gorbachev's good faith. This is a very difficult problem for the regime -- since of the USSR's seven decades three were dominated by the Georgian dictator. States, particularly young, multi-ethnic ones like the USSR, need unifying myths; to expose to public view all that occurred under Stalin would have grave implications for the party's prestige. Moreover, since much of Stalin's activity was fully in the Leninist tradition, real 'openness' would allow a posse of Solzhenitsyns to point the finger at the central myth and symbol of Soviet power. Yet even this pales

into insignificance when one contemplates the consequences of allowing Baltic, Ukrainian or Kazak intellectuals to probe into and publish the records of the Stalinist regime in their republics. Unfortunately for those who call for truthfulness, conservative leaders are right to insist that the regime simply cannot allow the truth to be told.

The great difficulties facing a Soviet reformer can also be illustrated by comparisons with the past. To my mind the best such comparison is not with the era of Khrushchev but with the reign of Alexander II (1855-1881), the period of the so-called 'Great Reforms'. The basic motive for these reforms was the belief that without them Russia would cease to be one of the world's leading states, with potentially disastrous results for the empire's security and unacceptable damage to the self-esteem of Russia's élite. Standing across the path of modernisation were a number of institutions, interests, values and habits, most of which were in some way linked to serfdom, and all of which blocked individual initiative and created a climate of rigidity and inertia. In many ways the difficulties and ramifications of abolishing serfdom in the 1850s were very similar to those attached to fundamental reform of the economic system today. In the event serfdom was abolished in 1861 and many other fundamental reforms followed. Yet the triumph of modernisation was scarcely unambiguous. Russia's rulers, then as now, were deeply concerned about the injury which economic liberalism would do to the well-being, values and political loyalties of the masses. In the name of political stability and the social contract between Tsar and peasant, major concessions were made to the peasantry's collectivist and egalitarian traditions by strengthening the power of the village commune over the individual peasant, a policy which undoubtedly retarded the growth of capitalism in the countryside. The fact that individualism was a Western principle and the commune a traditional Russian institution made the adoption of this policy all the easier.

Limited though Alexander II's reforms were by political fears, the imperial regime even so paid a heavy price for them. In the 1850s as today the government faced small but potentially influential groups of dissidents, some of whom could never be satisfied by any conceivable concession the regime could make.

Licensing, even mobilising, critical voices in the reform era to outmanoeuvre conservative opponents of change, the regime found these increasingly dissident voices hard to stifle and impossible to conciliate. Within six years of the end of the highly conservative and repressive reign of Nicholas I the radical movement was plotting the assassination of the Tsar, the overthrow of the Government and the abolition of private property and marriage. Moreover the long repressed discontent of the Empire's most troublesome minority, namely the Poles, burst forth uncontrollably once a degree of liberalisation got under way; suppression of the subsequent rebellion required the deployment of scores of thousands of Russian troops.

Parallels between the era of Alexander II and today abound. In considering the limitations and dangers of reform it is however necessary to weigh one factor present in the mid-nineteenth century which does not apply today. Defeat in the Crimea made it abundantly clear to educated Russians that failure to modernise brought great risks to national security and territorial integrity. This was an era in which wars between great powers were not infrequent, and great empires in decay were likely to be dismembered by hungry predators. This does not hold good for Gorbachev's Russia, which has not been shaken to its roots by a Crimea and (given the awesome consequences of a war between the great powers), is unlikely to be. So one can speculate that, although Gorbachev and his followers are aware of the urgency of reform, the same degree of awareness will not have gained hold either among the political élite or among society as a whole. It will therefore be even harder to defeat the forces of caution, inertia and conservatism than it was under Alexander II – especially once reforms begin to bite and a bill is presented in terms of instability and discontent within Soviet society. Indeed, although it is much too early in Gorbachev's reign to predict the ultimate results of his programme, one can already see how, in the last few months, advances on the economic front have been negligible and the influence of conservative elements in the leadership has grown.

Lessons from mid-Europe

Dr Antony Polonsky

ANYBODY INTERESTED IN EASTERN EUROPE will have a strong sense of *déjà vu* when he observes what Gorbachev is trying to do in the Soviet Union. Similar initiatives have been a feature of Eastern Europe for some time. It will be instructive, I think, to concentrate on the nature and experience of reforms there because they have been largely unsuccessful and could provide us with some clues to the difficulties that Gorbachev's reforms are bound to encounter.

Eastern Europe, it is true, is very different from the Soviet Union. The latter is a multi-national Eurasian Empire; the former a collection of small and medium sized states. Their political cultures are separate: the 1917 Revolution was a Soviet revolution and enjoys a degree of legitimacy in Russia which cannot be matched in say, Hungary or Poland. In Eastern Europe there is a better developed sense of civil society and a more rounded understanding of Western democratic values.

But these differences in culture ought not to deter us from seeing some parallels, especially in the question of revisionism. The revisionists – those who wish to change the system from within – have had two main goals in Eastern Europe. First to reform the economic structure by introducing a relatively free market. This, it was hoped, would reduce the weight of an overbearing central planning system, devolve power and foster individual initiative and enterprise. At the same time the revisionists hoped to democratize the Party, to give Parliament a greater role, and to generate discussion (and from that to give birth to fresh ideas). All this at the expense of those officials whose main preoccupation was preserve themselves.

These objectives were conceived in the period 1953-56 but it is clear that, despite the less repressive nature of all the East European regimes, they have not been successful. Why is this? Because the Soviet Union has used its veto in countries like Hungary in 1956 or Poland in that same year or Czechoslovakia in 1968 or Poland again in 1981? That is the usual answer. And

it is fair to say that the survival of the East European political system does ultimately depend upon the threat of Soviet intervention. Yet this is a limited answer, to a more complicated question. What of the factors inside Eastern Europe itself? They cannot be over-emphasised, if only because factors similar to these have constituted the likely hurdles to reform in the Soviet Union.

The central aim of Gorbachev's perestroika must be to reduce the power of a well entrenched and privileged élite. One of the familiar lessons to be drawn from the introduction of martial law in Poland in 1981, however, is that a small unrepresentative group of people with almost no support from the general public can keep in power if it has the support of the apparatus of coercion. Such support was not hard to find, even in a country like Poland.

Anyone who has done military service knows that armies are so structured as to make it very difficult indeed to disobey orders. In Gorbachev's Soviet Union I think it implausible that the army would go against the party bureaucracy in the event of the latter believing that their position had become unbearable and that the only solution was to act against Gorbachev. Not that this has taken place yet; but it is not hard to imagine the sort of people whom Dr Urban has talked about getting very unhappy. Secondly, the centralizing features of the economic system cannot be reformed without major setbacks. The power of the central planners themselves is considerable; it is easier said than done to talk of local industries deciding what they are going to do – how they are going to implement their plans, and spend their scarce resources. In Poland since 1981, General Jaruzelski has been committed to major economic reforms, but we are still waiting for the first firm to go bankrupt.

Then there is popular opposition. The reforms which Gorbachev has planned could be interpreted as an attempt to undermine the position of the industrial working class and strengthen the position of the privileged élite. The implications of economic reforms such as the redeployment of labour and the closure of factories affect the former more than they do the latter. The introduction of private enterprise and an economy based upon profit and loss could even seem like an attempt by the leadership to impose further restraints upon a working class

accustomed to the government subsidies of a command economy or, even worse, like an outright betrayal of the working class. It could also provide ammunition to those reactionary and demagogic leaders eager to advocate anti-reform policies.

There is one further example from the Eastern European experience of reform that could provide a barrier to change in the Soviet Union. That is the Yugoslav experiment. There, one finds far reaching political decentralization with effective autonomy for various Republics and regions, coupled with large scale economic decentralization. The result has been the creation of strong local interests, and any Socialist or even Yugoslav ideal which existed now plays a secondary role to the appeal of Moslem nationalism in Bosnia, and Croatian Catholic nationalism in Croatia. Those who recreated the Yugoslav national state in 1945 must be very depressed. In the Soviet Union, the Russians cannot fail to have realized that the outcome of decentralization will be similar to what has happened in Yugoslavia; a centralized system and the ideal of a super-national communism will be utterly subverted.

These factors, lurking in the Soviet system as they do, are bound to manifest themselves as Gorbachev goes about his reforms. They may, I suspect, gobble their host up.

My next point concerns the implications of Gorbachev's perestroika on Eastern Europe. By and large scepticism reigns, but some top officials are optimistic that there will be a move towards economic decentralization and economic efficiency; and that the Soviet Union will become preoccupied by the internal problems which beset it, leaving Eastern Europe to attend to its own reforms. That is the 'best' forecast. But it is not entirely improbable that a potentially explosive situation could arise out of all this. Reform, including decentralization, could lead to major upheavals as it did in the nineteenth century: a scenario which, improbable as it may sound, is something which we ought to entertain seriously.

Finally I think Gorbachev is unlikely to be successful in the substantial reforms which he is proposing in the economy and in political decentralization. In the political field we cannot but marvel at the kind of things which are emerging, but we should also worry about the reaction they will arouse. The strength and depth of the bureaucracy should never be underestimated in the

Soviet Union. Even in Eastern Europe, where the bureaucracy is weaker and has had less support, it has as a rule been able to maintain its own position. The fall of Yeltsin and the manner of his going has shown how arduous the task faced by Gorbachev will be.

The Russian disease

Dr George Urban

REFORMING THE SYSTEM FROM ABOVE and trying to make it catch up with its rivals in the West has a long tradition in Russian history. Arnold Toynbee saw it as the cause and defining characteristic of Russia's behaviour in the modern world. Time and again Russia would make a mighty effort to draw level, but no sooner would technological modernization be within her grasp than the elusive West would make yet another leap forward, leaving her behind once again. Peter the Great was the first ruler to put Russia through a forced march to catch up with Western technology, Stalin the last. The American Strategic Defence Initiative is only the most recent in a long chain of technological challenges to which Russia has found it hard to respond.

Gorbachev's attempt to reform and 'secularize' the Soviet system fits in with this picture. So does Stalin's own perestroika of the 1930s; but whereas Stalin tried to eliminate Russian backwardness by show-trials and the knout, Gorbachev is trying to do so by persuasion and a number of Western-style initiatives.

It remains to be seen whether the kid-glove approach can be made to work in the specific economic, moral and historical conditions of Soviet Russia, or whether Mr Gorbachev may end up using Stalinist methods to foist a measure of freedom and initiative on Soviet society. For, unlike the Tsars and Stalin before him, Gorbachev has to fight on two fronts, not one.

He has to overcome both the spirit of the Gulags and the spirit of Oblomovism; he has to eliminate the climate of state-sanctioned apathy, sluggishness and corruption. In other words, he has to declare war on Soviet Man in whom these characteristics are spectacularly united. This, Mr Gorbachev is now attempting to do.

I can, just, conceive that Gorbachev will be reasonably successful in removing from Soviet society some, perhaps even much, of the ethos of Stalinism and the tradition of the Gulags. It would be uncharitable to suppose that any society, even the

Russian, actually enjoys being ruled by the rod if there are other means available for satisfying basic human needs and the national interest.

It is much harder to see how Mr Gorbachev can defeat that torpor of the spirit, that lack of individual initiative and, above all, that streak of individual irresponsibility in public affairs that has set Russian civilization apart from Western civilizations and held it back for centuries.

The disease, let it be said, is now openly diagnosed in the Soviet Union. Tatyana Zaslavskaya castigates whenever she can the spirit of 'psychological inertia'. Abel Aganbegyan complains that Soviet managers are reluctant to restructure because 'they are afraid of responsibility and independence'. Nikolai Shishlin tells us that Soviet society has woken up from its 'Sleeping Beauty' sleep, but, he adds, 'the ship of the state remains to be reconstructed'. Nikolai Shmelev observes that 'massive apathy, indifference, theft, disrespect for honest labour, together with aggressive envy towards those who earn more... have led to the virtual physical degradation of a significant part of the people'. Oblomovism has seldom been better described.

There is, then, a good deal of scepticism and opposition to Gorbachev's 'new thinking' at the grass roots level of Soviet society. But, more important, there is opposition in the bureaucracy and especially the imperial civil service too. Of this we have, so far at least, not much written evidence, but we know that it exists because Mr Gorbachev and his supporters have told us so. Let me attempt to rehearse how these people might argue.

'We have advanced', they would say, 'from a backward agricultural society to superpower status using precisely those methods of planning and control that you now want us to abandon. Stalinism may have been unpleasant; the forced accumulation of capital may have been unpleasant; our bureaucratization under Brezhnev may have been corrupting, but all these things were, in one way or another, our way of doing things, and because they were in harmony with Russia's particular virtues and vices, they have brought us success. They have turned us into an empire which makes the world tremble. We have the whole of Eastern Europe and much of Central Europe in our possession. In Africa, the Middle East, the

Caribbean and South East Asia we have acquired a maritime dimension. We have moved close to the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. We have imposed discipline on our national minorities. Our economy may not be competitive by non-Russian standards and our social welfare institutions may lag behind those of Sweden or the Federal Republic of Germany – but we have done well by Russian expectations. No one in our country goes without a job, food or shelter. Our population is conscious of the advances we have made – not those we have failed to make. No rebellion is brewing in the ranks. So, why rock the boat? Your suggested reforms of the economy cannot be put into effect without jeopardizing the Soviet system as we have known it – and that would mean the end of the Russian nation's great rendezvous with history. Of course, we must change our forms of economic management. Of course, we must become technologically more efficient, but we must go slowly and adopt only those aspects of the Western way of life that are inseparable from Western technology.'

If these were, indeed, the arguments my imaginary Soviet imperial civil servant would make, they would strike me as convincing, for they rest on the facts – not the 'might-have-beens' – of history. They have Russian tradition, including Oblomovism and the Russian assimilation of coercion, on their side. They are part of the Russian landscape and reflect a wisdom we have all been familiar with at least since de Tocqueville, viz. that the time of danger for an authoritarian regime is not when repression is at its worst, but when the regime sets about reforming itself.

There is also another and more tangible reason why perestroika may not succeed, or succeed only partly and slowly. In post-war Britain socialism of a highly non-Soviet kind gained a modest foothold in our institutions. It has, nevertheless, taken Mrs Thatcher's Governments eight years to begin to roll it back and encourage the revival of the spirit of self-reliance, private initiative and responsibility. In the Soviet Union, no one since 1928 has managed a private enterprise, handled convertible currency (except on the black market) or observed a capital market in action. Three generations have grown up to be taught to despise the profit motive. Three generations have seen no management system other than the command economy, and no conception of economic good other than that accruing to the

benefit of the state. I would find it surprising if Mr Gorbachev's brave attempt to rekindle the entrepreneurial ethos of capitalism were to succeed, or succeed soon enough to make a difference. That Mr Gorbachev's 'Thatcherism' is paraded in Moscow in impeccably Leninist colours increases the confusion – not its chances of success.

Any reflection on Gorbachev's Russia inevitably raises the question: And what are we going to do about it? In purely power political terms, it is clearly not in the Western interest to help the Soviet Union to extricate herself from the bankrupt state of her economy so long as the system remains what it is. An economically backward Soviet state has given us enough headaches. An efficient and technologically advanced Russia would be even more difficult to deal with.

Mr Gorbachev's revolution cannot, it seems to me, materialize, if it can materialize at all, without Western co-operation, both passive and active. He wants us to take the military and technological pressure off his system and help him, in the longer term, to reshape his economy. We should not squarely reject his approaches.

We should rather tell him: 'We agree with you that the world has shrunk and become interdependent. Our word for interdependence is linkage. We are going to help you if you can see your way clear to taking care of certain problems that concern us because they are a threat to world peace.'

I would then list at least three conditions. First, the rapid withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan; second, a new deal for the whole of Eastern Europe which would begin with the removal of Soviet troops and bases from Czechoslovakia and Hungary; and third, the cessation of Soviet interference in Central America. We could think of others, but these would do for a start. Seeing that it is the Soviet Union that is in trouble and the West in a position to assist or not to assist her, this may not be a bad time for putting linkage to the test. That the current American-Soviet arms control negotiations do not contain a strong element of linkage outside the actual arms control area, is a great weakness in our position.

At the same time, we should return Mr Gorbachev's friendly overtures with friendly noises of our own in terms of the Helsinki accords, that is: in terms of cultural and scientific

co-operation, tourism, environmental coordination and the like. Neither the US nor any Western European country can remain psychologically or politically indifferent to the spectacle of the modern world's most tyrannical system trying to find its way to a measure of freedom and democracy. It can never be entirely ruled out that a more permissive Soviet society will inhibit the Kremlin's expansionism – although the historical evidence rather points the other way.

I, for one, cannot deny Mr Gorbachev a certain grudging admiration. He is a great player in a great game. Would we had people of his calibre at the head of certain Western chancelleries. He has taken on a difficult political culture, and an 18th century civilization that needs to be dragged direct into the 21st. He is, as Stalin was, a profoundly un-Marxist phenomenon in that he is not waiting for impersonal class forces to cut the cloth of history but is doing it himself.

Will he fail? I think he probably will, but I marvel at the audacity of his challenge to Russian traditions and to the Party that bred him.