



A few weeks after taking office as general secretary of the Communist Party, Gorbachev was on the road, mingling with crowds, explaining perestroika. Here he talks with residents of Krylatskaya, a Moscow suburb, in May 1985.

Reform in Russia

"This society is ripe for a change," Mikhail Gorbachev wrote in 1987, adding that any delay in launching *perestroika*—the "restructuring" of the failing Soviet system, notably its economy—could have led to "serious social, economic, and political crises." Seven decades after the Bolshevik Revolution, Gorbachev is pushing his 286 million compatriots to speak out, to explore "new thinking," to support more autonomy in the workplace and more democracy in the Communist Party—all in Lenin's name. Some Western scholars believe that Gorbachev must overcome not just the legacy of Joseph Stalin, but also 1,000 years of Russian history. Here, S. Frederick Starr compares the current bewildering upheaval to past eras of Russian reform; he finds some strong similarities. Robert Rand reports on ordinary Muscovites' reactions to Gorbachev's promises of a better life.

A PECULIAR PATTERN

by S. Frederick Starr

A reforming crusade grips the USSR. Enthusiasts of change call for new laws, new economic mechanisms, even a new and more independent national psychology in place of the old conformism. What Gorbachev calls "rapid transformations in all spheres of our life" are exhilarating to some, threatening to others. For everyone—in the Soviet Union and abroad—they are confusing.

Where does one turn to make sense of it all? Many Western observers seek parallels to Gorbachev's *perestroika* elsewhere. Some scrutinize current "market-oriented" reforms in China or Hungary, or the troubled experiments in Communist Yugoslavia. Others seek hints about the Soviet future in Western Europe's past or even in Third World experiences.

Many Soviets have begun examining

previous waves of reform in their own country. Newly published memoirs of the Khrushchev "thaw" (1956–64) find avid readers in Moscow. Gorbachev himself often hails the era of Lenin's New Economic Policy (1921–28) as a pattern for the present—without reference to the era's darker side. Those with a longer view turn to episodes of reform under the tsars. Some think the way in which quasi-parliamentary government was established and then curtailed under Nicholas II in 1905–07 holds lessons for today. Others look to the first decade of Alexander II's reign (1856–66)—a period of legal reforms, decentralization in government, and military cutbacks—all, then as now, in a climate of openness. Further in the past, certain reforms under Catherine II in the 1760s and the *perestroika* under Peter I after 1700 stir debate

in Moscow. Western scholars, too, are re-examining the Russian past in hope of gaining insights into the Soviet present.

Implicit in all this is the question: Is there a peculiarly Russian way of reform?

It would appear so, and pessimists argue that past patterns do not augur well for the Soviet future. Indeed, sharp swings between eras of stagnation and spurts of dynamism followed by reaction or torpor have been a feature of Russia's history since at least the 17th century. The causes are not hard to find. The absence of both a vigorous private sector and an elected parliament has always given the centralized bureaucracy unfettered power to act—or not to act. Thus, instead of the constant shifts and tradeoffs that preoccupy peacetime politicians in democracies, Russia has experienced something else: a few bouts of massive change, each in response to a crisis.

Over the centuries, other elements have reinforced this tendency. Among them:

- Without orderly means of succession, most tsars and Communist party general secretaries have stayed in office until removed by death, palace coups, or rebellion. Even the most reformist among them have eventually settled for self-preservation.

- Russia's historic hunger for security or imperial prestige has thwarted steady economic and social evolution. With so much of the budget committed to the military, there has been little money left for new civilian needs or general uplift.

- Official controls on free expression and international contacts have suppressed the natural yeasts in Russian society, further blocking normal development.

Together, such factors give Russian history a certain "geological" character, with

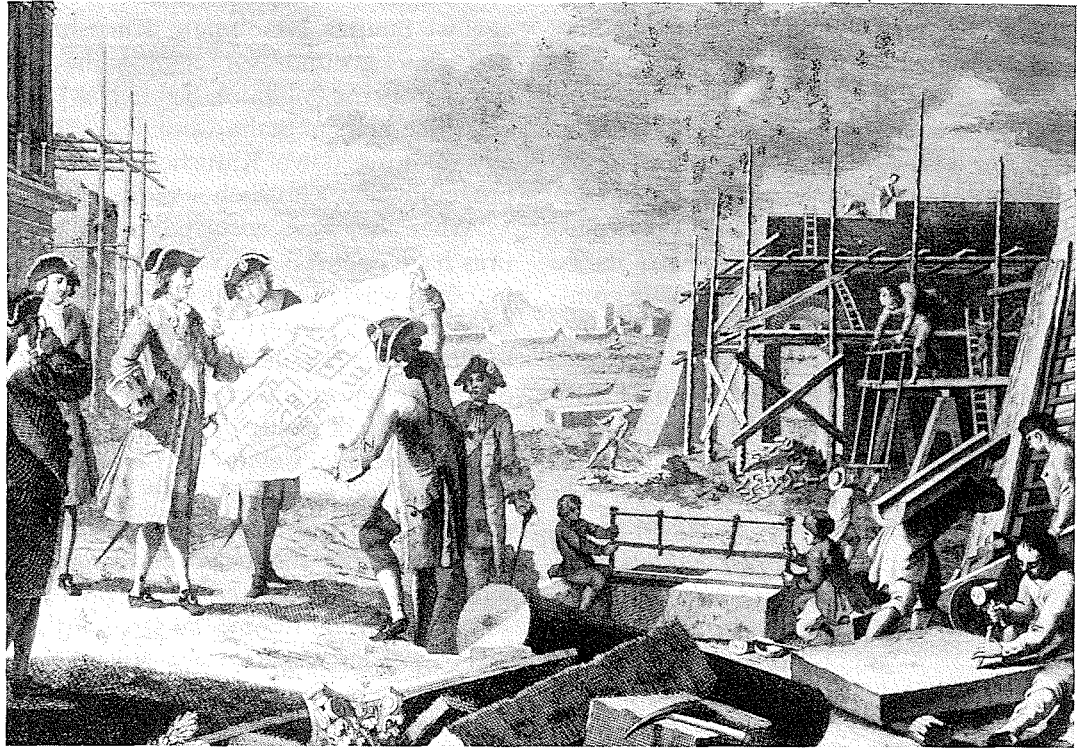
long eras when the tectonic plates are locked and short eras during which rapid, grinding shifts occur. Sometimes the plates clash with explosive force. Such was the case during the bloody upheavals and civil war of 1917–20 and the undeclared revolution and civil strife accompanying Stalin's rise in 1928–31. Occasionally, too, leadership of Russia has fallen to men committed to ceaseless innovations, regardless of cost or attendant suffering. Such was the case with Ivan IV ("The Terrible," 1533–84), and Peter I ("The Great," 1682–1725).

The few periods of genuine reform in Russia have not been the product of great upheavals or complete social breakdown. They were relatively unmarked by terror, and were something more than the creation of a restless or maniacal leader. To a surprising degree, Russia's reformist surges have conformed to a common scenario.

First, reform has generally been preceded by years of rigid rule at the top, which masked deep shifts in the society below. Thus, while Tsar Nicholas I (1825–55) was keeping the lid on change by dispatching suspected radicals to Siberia, innovative young men in the junior ranks of his own bureaucracy were plotting the limited reforms they later implemented. The legalization of political parties by Nicholas II in 1905 was preceded by several decades during which his government spared no effort to suppress them, even as they developed unofficially. Today, we are seeing the official adoption of ideas that were similarly suppressed by Leonid Brezhnev but which gained wide support among educated folk nonetheless.

This prior frustration and subsequent

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Tsar Peter I ("the Great") overseeing the construction of St. Petersburg (now Leningrad). His chief domestic effort was "Westernization"—only a partial success.

commitment to change links all the reform eras. Long before Catherine II ousted her drill sergeant husband, Peter III, in 1762, she had become a magnet for all those educated Russians who were alienated by his crude behavior. Khrushchev's "thaw" after 1956 gave a first taste of liberalization to Gorbachev and encouragement to a generation of young officials and intellectuals who had been stymied (or terrorized) by their elders during the Stalin era.

Today, pro-Gorbachev activists like the journalist Feodor Burlatsky, who was fired twice under Gorbachev's predecessors, or economist Tatiana Zaslavskaya, whose calls for change under Brezhnev had circulated only among fellow specialists, represent the suppressed underside of the previous era.

What has triggered episodes of change in Russia?

Marxist historians long argued that reform was invariably a response to mounting unrest among peasants or workers. But this scarcely fits the pre-Gorbachev situation, nor the preludes to other major Russian reform eras—with the exception of 1905, when strikes paralyzed Nicholas II's capital and peasant uprisings rocked the countryside. More commonly, it has taken an external shock to shake up the regime and its supporters. Military defeat has often provided such a shock.

The upheavals launched by Peter I—focusing on Western-oriented economic and technological uplift—came in the wake of disastrous campaigns against the Tartars on the southern steppes and of defeat at the hands of Sweden's King Charles XII in 1700. The "Great Reforms"

of Alexander II followed the disastrous Crimean War against England and France (1853–56) and the 1905 reforms of Nicholas II were introduced immediately after Russia's defeat by imperial Japan. In the same vein, Gorbachev's call for change in 1985 came just as the country was beginning to face up to its failed military intervention in Afghanistan, and its costly commitments to Vietnam, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, Angola, and Cuba.

Historians may counter by citing Catherine II's campaigns for reform, which followed not Russia's defeat but her victory in the Seven Years' War (1756–63). While this triumph marked Russia's successful entry into European politics, it had ruinous consequences nonetheless. As the Empress stated "In the treasury I found imperial *Ukaz*es for payments totaling 17 million roubles, which had not been met. The currency was valueless . . ."

Tsars Alexander II and Nicholas II faced similar postwar fiscal crises. Both sought to cushion the shock by taking out huge loans from Western European banks. After the Crimean fiasco, Alexander borrowed to prevent the collapse of Russia's state bank. After the loss to Japan, Nicholas II's loans from France were the largest international debts incurred anywhere at the time. Gorbachev's recent \$9 billion line of credit from Western and Japanese banks fits the same pattern. The size of these loans attests to the anxiety with which Gorbachev views the domestic strain caused by his predecessors' military spending policies.

Nikita Khrushchev (1956–64) is the obvious exception to the linkage between war and reform. In his famous "Secret Speech" to the 1956 Communist Party Congress, Khrushchev excoriated Stalin for his brutality. However, with no record of military failure or ensuing financial chaos to hurl

against Stalin's henchmen, Khrushchev had scant grounds for ousting the Old Guard from the Politburo. Fighting as insiders, these heirs of Stalin were able eventually to bring down Khrushchev's reform program—and Khrushchev himself.

When they have occurred, military failures have contributed to domestic reform in other ways. Defeat suspends, however briefly, Russian leaders' chronic tendency to stress foreign policy—that is, expansion of Russian power and imperial prestige—at the expense of domestic affairs. Scarcely was Gorbachev in office than he spoke of the need for *peredyshka*, or "breathing space," from overseas commitments. In practice, he has conducted more vigorous diplomacy than his immediate predecessors, notably in wooing Western Europe and bargaining with America. Nonetheless, the stated purpose is not imperial expansion but creating the international stability necessary for reforms at home.

The immediate initiative for change in Russia always comes from the top. With the exception of the reforms extracted from Nicholas II after the revolution of 1905, every era of benevolent change in Russian history has coincided with the advent to power of a new ruler.

Yet the ability—and desire—of a would-be reformer to install key administrators committed to change may be the most accurate indicator of future success. Here, Gorbachev looks very strong, stronger than any of his reform-minded predecessors, having surrounded himself with the likes of his adviser Alexander Yakovlev, his foreign minister Edward Shevardnadze, and Moscow-party chief Lev Zaikov. By comparison, Khrushchev had few such backers and as a result was forced to work more as a soloist than as leader of a team.

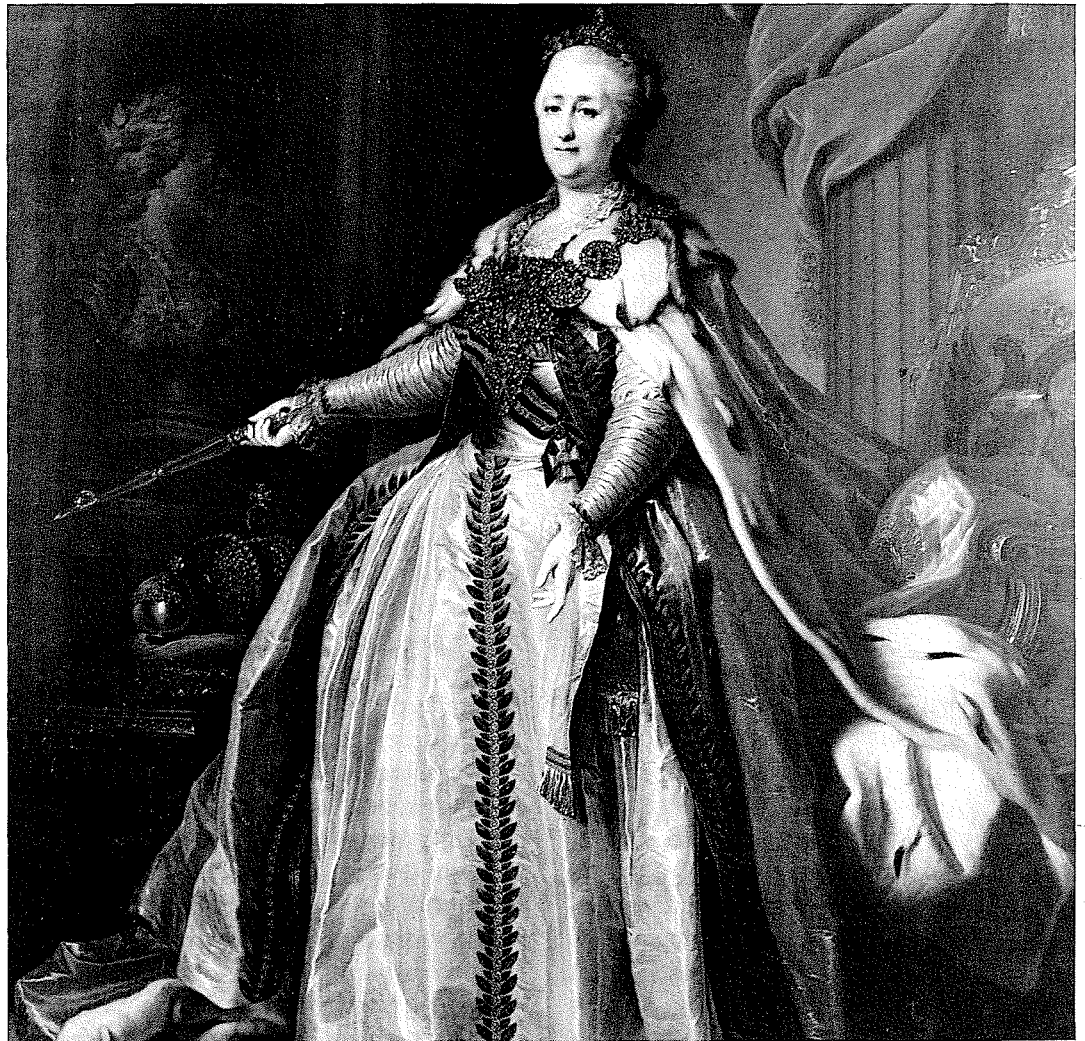
Glasnost (openness) has always been part of the scenario. It entered Russia's political vocabulary during the reformist

phase of Catherine II's reign. It became central to the policies of Alexander II, and has reemerged under Gorbachev as a necessary condition of reform. Under all three rulers (and during the reformist years of Alexander I and Khrushchev) people who only a few years earlier had been branded "dissidents" were given a public forum.

In every case, then as now, Russia's reformers have been acutely aware of the political benefits. With their predecessors in disgrace, reformers can advocate glasnost,

confident that, initially, most of the opinions emanating from the press will be critical of the old order. The real test comes later, when the new regime's foes exploit the same openness to discredit reform.

And without exception, Russia's reformist episodes have coincided with the most cosmopolitan periods in the nation's history; Russia, so often xenophobic and closed off, opens up at such times. The 17th-century reforming tsar Alexei (1645-76) was far more hospitable to Western



Catherine the Great. During her reign (1762-1796), the empire expanded, trade grew, and Russia became a major player in European politics, albeit without lasting internal reform.

ideas than any of his predecessors. Alexander I's reformism had been encouraged by his tutor, the Swiss philosopher Frédéric-César de La Harpe; Alexander II permitted the publication of works by British, French, and German political economists advocating policies that had been anathema under his predecessor. In the same spirit, the public inauguration of Khrushchev's brief reform era was the International Youth Festival held in Moscow in 1957. Nominally a gathering of communist youths from abroad, this became in fact an unprecedented exhibit of the latest in Western fashions, pop culture, and art.

Gorbachev's massive importation of Western books, films, concert artists and exhibits places him squarely in this tradition. In accepting President Reagan's 1986 invitation to send 1500 young Soviets to the United States and through similar exchanges of scientists, he emulates Peter I, Catherine II, Alexander I—and Khrushchev, who signed the Soviets' first cultural exchange agreement with the Americans in 1958. Gorbachev clearly is seeking to strengthen the zeal of those backing change by putting them in contact with advanced ideas and practices abroad.

Russia has long been remarkable for its ability to borrow, adapt, and assimilate innovations from overseas, especially during eras of reform. The pattern was well established even before Peter I's reign, when Russia absorbed Western ideas on everything from the Roman alphabet to shipbuilding and zoology. Catherine II's famous *Instruction*, given to the commission she established to rewrite Russia's laws, was based on Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*. When Alexander II set about emancipating the serfs his officials reviewed all West European legislation on the subject. Virtually every reform of the "tsar liberator" drew heavily on foreign

models, whether German and French ideas on law or British notions of self-government. Later, during the drafting of the Constitution of 1905, Nicholas II's bureaucrats in St. Petersburg reviewed the experience of many Western nations, in preparing new laws on political parties and the press.

Fifty years later, however, the USSR's self-conscious role as Mother Church of the Communist world curbed Khrushchev's inclinations to draw on foreign models in planning his reforms. The Soviets had difficulty admitting that they were "backward" in any sphere. Nonetheless, his rule was marked by borrowing from abroad in matters as diverse as agriculture and education. That Khrushchev did not borrow more reflects the limited scale of his reform effort overall.

By contrast, Gorbachev seems to have reverted to the cultural and institutional borrowing of the tsar-reformers of old. Sympathetic intellectuals and bureaucrats have been encouraged to draw on the latest foreign experience. Thus, sociologist Tatiana Zaslavskaya has championed the development of public opinion polling along American lines, and journalist Feodor Burlatsky, head of the USSR's official Human Rights Commission, has been guided by standards elaborated by Western jurists and civil libertarians.

Most important, Gorbachev's critique of centralized planning and his espousal of partial deregulation and a degree of privatization of the economy reveal the influence, albeit carefully filtered, of the policies of Britain's Margaret Thatcher and America's Ronald Reagan. Not since the rise to power in 1917 of revolutionaries inspired by Karl Marx, a German, have the fundamentals of change in Russia been more directly influenced by Western ideas.

Not surprisingly, emulation being the most sincere form of flattery, Westerners have always taken Russian reformers to

TSAR ALEXANDER II

A British observer, Andrew D. White, visited Russia in 1854 and again in 1892, 31 years after Alexander's emancipation of the serfs. He later wrote:

"A change had indeed been brought by the emancipation of the serfs, but there was little outward sign of it. The muzhik [peasant] remained to all appearance, what he was before . . . The peasants, with their sheepskin caftans, cropped hair, and stupid faces brought back the old impressions so vividly that I seemed not to have been absent a week."

From *Russia: A History* (Lippincott, 1964) by Sidney Harcave



their hearts. Until their eventual disillusionment, noted Western intellectuals outdid themselves in praising Catherine II, their disciple and financial patron. Voltaire effused that "France persecutes philosophers while the Scythians protect them." Friedrich Grimm, who served as Catherine's diplomatic representative in his native Hamburg, even penned a worshipful parody of the Lord's prayer, which began "Our Mother, who art in Russia . . ."

During the early years of the 19th century, Tsar Alexander I toyed with reform; several aides even advocated an American-style federal system for Russia. The tsar himself entered into correspondence with Thomas Jefferson, whose admiration for the young ruler was so great that he placed Alexander's bust in the entrance hall at Monticello, where it can still be seen. True, Jefferson was also grateful to the tsar for his diplomatic support of the United States in its differences with England. In the same

way, Lincoln's high regard for Alexander II may have been due at least as much to the latter's support for the Union during the Civil War as for his emancipation of the serfs. Preoccupied with his own secession crisis at home, Lincoln turned a blind eye to Alexander's brutal crushing of the Polish nationalist uprising of 1863.

Today, older Americans still remember Khrushchev at the United Nations pounding the rostrum with his shoe. Yet in late 1959 Khrushchev was welcomed across the land as President Eisenhower's guest. Americans appreciated this folksy and inquisitive visitor for his genuine enthusiasm for U.S. achievements, notably in Corn Belt agriculture. The fact that the Red Army's tanks had crushed the Hungarian revolt only three years earlier was not forgotten. Yet much was forgiven in the hope that a better day was dawning in Moscow.

The present "Gorbomania" in Europe and North America probably surpasses Western admiration for any previous Russian reformer. Europe's intellectuals enthused over Catherine II but its kings and prime ministers were far more circumspect. Other reforming tsars earned plaudits abroad but never to the point where their well-wishers lost sight of the autocratic nature of the Russian regime.

Gorbachev, by contrast, has persuaded many opinion-leaders abroad that Western governments are duty-bound not merely to maintain an even-handed policy toward the USSR but to become active collaborators in his domestic program. The fact that he, no less than Catherine II, relies on autocratic power to bring about change or that he, no less than Alexander II or Nicholas II, may be backing domestic reform as a necessary step toward rebuilding Russia's strength as a world power, seems temporarily to be overlooked. As Margaret Thatcher put it, "I like Mr. Gorbachev. I can do business with him." For the time being, West-



Tsar Nicholas II leaving Moscow's St. Basil's Cathedral during the 1890s. Ahead lay the 1905 revolution, reform and reaction, World War I, and the 1917 Bolshevik upheaval.

ern opinion-leaders seem more impressed by what Gorbachev seeks to change than by what he insists must be left in place, notably a one-party regime and an economy still dominated by the state.

At first glance, one is struck by the differences among the goals of Russia's various reformers. Catherine II had to decide what duties were owed to the state by Russia's land-owning gentry. Alexander I confronted the question of how to rule the non-Russian peoples of the empire. Alexander II faced the problem of ending serfdom. Nicholas II had to decide on whether to permit an elected legislature. Khrushchev contended with the relation-

ship between the Communist party and the government apparatus, while Gorbachev faces the heavy legacy of Stalinist planning in the economy.

Yet for all their diversity, Russia's episodes of uplift share a family resemblance. Reformers have invariably called for some sort of administrative decentralization and some transfer of control over certain governmental functions either to local citizens' bodies or to private groups.

The basic thrust in each case has been to enlist local and private energies in the solution of the nation's current problems. In effect, the "Russian way of reform" is to shift initiative from discredited central bureaucrats to local administrators, and from

ineffectual state officials to private forces. This is the underlying purpose behind Gorbachev's dismantling of the centralized State Planning Agency, his efforts to dismiss thousands of Moscow bureaucrats, his decentralization of certain remaining administrative functions, his willingness to tolerate mushrooming informal citizens' groups, and his support for the establishment of private ("cooperative") businesses. All this he characterizes as "fulfilling the people's socialist self-government."

Such efforts, the Russian leader knows, cannot succeed unless local managers and the citizenry have access to the information needed to make sound decisions. This accounts for the loosening of controls on the press and the overall glasnost in every reform era, and also the recurring emphasis on law, as opposed to autocratic commands, as a means of regulating society.

It is no surprise that Catherine, both Alexanders, and Gorbachev have all stressed the need for an independent judiciary, and placed legal matters at the center of their program. When Gorbachev speaks of his dream of a "state based on law" he is alluding to and translating the same German notion of a *Rechtsstaat* that inspired judicial reformers under Alexander II, 125 years earlier. Gorbachev had been exposed to this tradition at Moscow University's law department, where it was presented as an ideal superseded by Communism but nonetheless worthy of study.

The inner logic of all these efforts, then as now, is that they may ease the state apparatus out of a blind corner into which it has been wedged thanks to its own ineptitude. Disorganized, disdained by the public, and, above all, strapped financially, the government which every Russian reformer inherits is not able to act on its own to resolve the crisis. "Decentralization" and "citizen

participation" are not just philosophical ideals but stark necessities.

Who has the power to bring on reform in Russia? Under tsars and commissars alike the power has rested with the autocrat. To be sure, Catherine established her Legislative Commission to give the appearance of consultation, just as Alexander II set up provincial committees of gentry and Gorbachev has convened special conferences of the Communist Party to consider and adopt new proposals. But in the end, all of Russia's reforming rulers have relied on their personal power to impose change and have even increased centralized authority in the name of reform. Thus, Gorbachev's move, in June 1988, to buttress his personal power by creating a new presidency for himself stands squarely in the Russian tradition from Catherine to Khrushchev. All these rulers have acknowledged that, however much benefit reform might bring to the public at large or to the state, it invariably produces resistance from the stubborn phalanx of bureaucrats whose prerogatives it will diminish. Hence, the reformer must build "clout."

Reforming leaders in Russia all have claimed a new age is dawning. Catherine adorned her palaces with images of the sun. Alexander II at the time of the serfs' emancipation welcomed an editorial by the emigré publicist Alexander Herzen declaring "Galilean, thou hast conquered!" The title of Ilya Ehrenburg's novel *The Thaw* came to stand for Khrushchev's era as a whole, while today Mikhail Gorbachev stresses "new thinking" and goes out of his way to meet with former dissidents like academician Andrei Sakharov to symbolize his break with the past.

Yet Soviet society is far too complex, dispersed, and diverse for all its elements to move forward at the same pace. As in tsarist days, reform eventually reaches a plateau. While some Russians conclude that

change has gone too far, many others want change to proceed farther and faster. Thus, the National Front organizations established recently in the three Baltic republics and Georgia have swept beyond Gorbachev in calling for a mixed economy and near-complete autonomy. Other radical activists have recently called for independent political parties and an immediate move toward parliamentary democracy. Such appeals particularly attract the young, who in each reform era take for granted the hard-won changes introduced by their elders, complaining instead about compromises made along the way. Without exception, Russia's past episodes of reform have given rise to radical movements and dissidents advocating further liberalization.

Such currents of protest may easily swell into violence. Under Catherine II, the peasant rebel Emelian Pugachev led armed insurrectionists against Moscow with the claim that Catherine was a usurper who had used reform to worsen the lot of most

peasants. Peasant resistance to Alexander II's less than total emancipation of the serfs was also strong. It gained the support of radical youths in Russian universities, who dismissed the tsar's entire program as hypocrisy. Industrial strikes and peasant unrest following Nicholas II's October Manifesto were so threatening that within a year his regime had canceled many of the civil rights included in the Manifesto.

Khrushchev, too, had to deal with popular upheavals. In 1962 he called out troops to quell a strike in the southern city of Novochoerkassk, killing seventy people, and then used police and soldiers again to put down an outburst in the Ukrainian town of Krivoi Rog. It was in this environment that Khrushchev introduced harsh punishments for the dissemination of "anti-Soviet propaganda" and brought offenders to trial in Minsk, Omsk, and Leningrad.

Nominating Gorbachev for the general

CONTRADICTIONS

In September 1944, having returned to Moscow after a seven-year absence, George F. Kennan, then a U.S. Foreign Service officer, wrote a report to Washington. One excerpt:

"Russia remains today, more than ever, an enigma for the Western world. Simple American minds imagine that this is because 'we don't know the truth about it.' They are wrong. It is not our lack of knowledge which causes us to be puzzled by Russia. It is that we are incapable of understanding the truth about Russia when we see it.

"We are incapable, in the first place, of understanding the role of contradiction in Russian life. The Anglo-Saxon instinct is to attempt to smooth away contradictions, to reconcile opposing elements, to achieve something in the nature of an acceptable middle ground as a basis for life. The Russian tends to deal only in extremes, and he is not particularly concerned to reconcile them. To him, contradiction is a familiar thing. It is the essence of Russia. West and East, Pacific and Atlantic, Arctic and tropics, extreme cold and extreme heat, prolonged sloth and sudden feats of energy, exaggerated cruelty and exaggerated kindness, ostentatious wealth and dismal squalor, violent xenophobia and uncontrollable yearning for contact with the foreign world, vast power and the most abject slavery, simultaneous love and hate for the same objects: These are only some of the contradictions which dominate the lives of the Russian people.

"The Russian does not reject these contradictions. He has learned to live with them, and in them . . ."

From *Memoirs: 1925-1950* (Little, Brown, 1967) by George F. Kennan

secretaryship, the veteran Soviet diplomat Andrei Gromyko warned that the new leader has "a broad smile but teeth of steel." Gorbachev has yet to bite down hard with these teeth, but if past patterns hold, he will eventually do so. Many, including both supporters and critics, see his decision to use the Red Army to quell Armenian unrest in early 1988 as evidence that he is already resorting to force to define the limits of reform. The Kremlin's stricter laws on political demonstrations (introduced last summer) support this view, but the evidence so far is not conclusive. Gorbachev's deputy, Alexander Yakovlev, has warned autonomists in the Baltic states against radicalism but the central government has so far refrained from overt intervention there. Similarly, Moscow officials have fulminated against the growing number of wildcat strikes, but have not used force against them. Negotiation holds the edge over confrontation—for the time being.

Most Russian and Soviet reformers have eventually alienated the country's intellectuals. Scarcely had Catherine II's reform drive gained momentum in the 1770s than a young writer, Denis Fonvizin, began using her *glasnost* to write pungent satires on the shallow worldliness he attributed to her reign. Over the next few years, others followed suit, including Alexander Radishchev, who affirmed that most Russians were worse off under her rule than before and that her innovations were a sham.

So bitter was the opposition to Alexander I by the end of his reign that it led to the so-called Decembrist Uprising of young intellectuals in the army in 1825. Within a decade of his coronation, Alexander II also lost the intellectuals, among them the novelist Leo Tolstoy, whose disillusionment with reform (and politics in general) is described in *Anna Karenina*.

In the fourth year of his rule, Gorbachev's standing with the intellectual com-

munity—especially those of its members in their forties and fifties—remains high. He has given them unprecedented freedom and public visibility. However, there are ripples of discontent. Andrei Sakharov's sharp criticism of Gorbachev's efforts to enhance his own power may be a harbinger of future moves by Moscow intellectuals to distance themselves from the gritty realities of reform.

Indeed, in Russia, as elsewhere, enthusiasm for innovation eventually runs its course. Leading partisans of change retire or are replaced. Those who remain—or survive—devote themselves more to preserving past reforms than to instituting new ones. No American should be surprised, in light of the eventual waning of public and Congressional support for Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.

In Russia, the reformers' central difficulty is that they must necessarily rely on the apparatus whose flaws created the need for an overhaul in the first place. Possibly in the same way that decentralization under Alexander II eventually died at the hands of the same provincial bureaucrats who had caused the old system to fail, Gorbachev's decentralization of ministries and industrial operations is confronting stubborn antipathy from the bureaucracy at the local level.

Meanwhile, if the past is any guide, the gradual recovery of national self-confidence will eventually lead the Kremlin back into the international arena where such pride typically is best indulged. Just as the passing of America's "post-Vietnam syndrome" caused both Republicans and Democrats to call for increased spending on defense by 1980, so the passing of a "post-Crimean syndrome" in the 1860s and of a "post-Japan syndrome" in the 1910s led the Russian impe-

rial leadership to seek ways to reassert national prestige abroad.

What this suggests is that Gorbachev's goals at home are more easily accomplished while the present "post-Afghanistan syndrome" endures. If and when it fades, a more interventionist foreign policy is likely to re-emerge. Andrei Sakharov has recently asserted that a mood supportive of such a policy is already setting in. If and when events confirm his judgment, one can be sure that the current wave of reform will have passed.

But is Gorbachev different? Russia's experience to date may lead Americans to pessimistic conclusions. Clearly, a chronic feature of Russian reform

efforts is their tendency to surge up, flourish, and then fade away within five or, at most, ten years. Far from being a chronicle of steady problem-solving and progress, Russian history suggests that the same difficulties recur—and that reformers seek to cure them with the same ultimately futile strategies. If the present era fits this pattern, Gorbachev's efforts are as doomed to failure as were those of Catherine II, the two Alexanders, Nicholas II, and Khrushchev.

The Soviet Union's present characteristics lend special reinforcement to this gloomy prognosis. Until the last three generations, a substantial percentage of the population worked in small-scale agriculture and were thus partially sheltered from the great economic winds blowing over the



Khrushchev in Iowa, 1959. During a quick American tour, the Soviet premier inspected (and envied) the corn crop at the farm of Roswell Garst (left) near Cedar Rapids.

land. Today, with the population far more urbanized and with most peasants working on large "industrial" farms, nearly all Soviet citizens feel directly any failures in the economy. The present government may be committed to reform but its commitment could change rapidly if economic hardships—shortages, inflation, and the like—are not soon relieved. Continued economic distress could stir up political trouble—and calls for a return to more familiar ways of doing things.

Yet in some important ways, Gorbachev and his team of collaborators differ from their predecessors. For example:

- The pro-reform faction within the Soviet government today is far larger than it was in Khrushchev's time, more conscious of its own role, and far better organized.

- Gorbachev himself is a pragmatic experimenter, far less narrowly committed to a specific path of change than were Catherine II or Alexander I, and less given to "hare-brained schemes" than Khrushchev.

- Gorbachev is not only older and stronger but more experienced than any of the reforming tsars. He has the immeasurable advantage of having spent twenty years learning from the failure of Khrushchev's prior efforts.

Yet if the Gorbachev era is not to go down in history as just another brief cycle of top-down reform, success may be due more to underlying social factors than to Gorbachev's psyche or skills. Throughout history, Russian reformers have been divided between those rulers who sought to force the people to conform to some ideal blueprint and those rulers who were themselves swept along by dynamic changes in society. There is something quixotic about Catherine II, Alexander I, and Khrushchev, all three of whom wanted to impose from above some new order that scarcely suited the actual circumstances of their countrymen. Alexander II and Nicholas II, by con-

SOVIET CONSERVATISM

In 1985, just before Gorbachev took power, Princeton's Stephen Cohen discussed the bureaucratic opposition to economic reform, and suggested that many ordinary Soviets were conservatives too:

"Underlying [everything] is the entire Soviet historical experience with its particular combination of majestic achievements and mountainous misfortunes. Man-made catastrophes have repeatedly victimized millions of ordinary citizens and officials alike—the first European war, revolution, civil war, two great famines, forcible collectivization, Stalin's terror, World War II, and more. Out of that experience . . . have come the joint pillars of today's Soviet conservatism: a towering pride in the nation's modernization, wartime, and great-power achievements, together with an abiding anxiety that another disaster forever looms and that any significant change is therefore 'some sinister Beethovenian knock of fate on the door.' Such a conservatism is at once prideful and fearful and thus doubly powerful. It influences most segments of the Soviet populace, even many dissidents. It is a real bond between state and society—and thus the main obstacle to change."

From *Rethinking the Soviet Experience* (Oxford, 1985) by Stephen F. Cohen

trast, were more reactive, making changes at the governmental level to fit more closely the needs of the changing populace. However reluctant or indecisive, these two tsars were more successful as reformers and the changes they instituted were more substantial.

There is considerable evidence that the Gorbachev era fits more closely the latter pattern than the former. Soviet society is in flux. Gorbachev may decry the "stagnation" of Brezhnev's reign, but the shifts in those years were dramatic, and he knows it. Nine-tenths of all Soviet youths finish high school today, as compared with one-third in 1960. New technologies—notably radio, cassettes, and television—have opened vast worlds of

information to the average Soviet citizen. An expanding telephone system enables Soviet citizens to form links with each other and to "network" according to common interests and causes. Back when the Soviet economy mainly produced steel and other basic goods it could fairly easily be managed through commands from the top. No longer. To produce the more sophisticated products needed today, greater initiative must be granted to low-level managers and technicians.

Stated differently, Soviet society has outgrown the Kremlin's "command economy" system and modern technology makes that system obsolete under any circumstances. Low productivity, far from being evidence of Russians' innate passivity and sloth, attests to the unwillingness of independent-minded people to function merely as cogs in a bureaucratic machine, without civil rights and with limited access to information. In effect, they "vote" against the system by abstaining from work and by cutting deals on the side.

Together, these conditions create an environment dramatically different from those faced by previous reformers. While a few elites may have backed change under Catherine II or Alexander I, society at large, rural and uneducated, was indifferent. Similarly, the educated elite under Alexander II had outgrown the legal and governmental structures inherited from earlier tsars, but the peasantry's evolution was far slower, which may explain the limited character of

the peasant emancipation. The pace of fundamental industrial and social evolution prior to the reforms of Nicholas II was more brisk, pushing the government towards change. Khrushchev, by contrast, ruled a society still reeling from Stalin's upheavals, and he more easily got by with half-measures.

The outright dissidence that slowly welled up under all these reformers could be dealt with through force or the threat of force. Gorbachev, too, can use his "steel teeth" but he cannot do so in secret. News of his use of force would quickly spread at home and abroad, exacting a political price in the process. Hence, it is no surprise that he has grown steadily more willing to contemplate even the boldest reforms, and that a tone of mounting urgency can be detected in his calls for change.

Does Gorbachev sense that the current mood could evolve into a more revolutionary climate if he does not quickly institute measures that get at the root of the USSR's problems? Maybe. But should violence increase or terrorism erupt, the Kremlin leadership will come face-to-face with the dilemma that confronted such previous reformers as Alexander II and Nicholas II: whether to forge ahead and lead the country into unknown and possibly risky realms or to recoil and resort to force to create the semblance of order.

No prior reformer in Russian or Soviet history has been bold enough to follow the former course. At some point, Gorbachev will confront a momentous choice: whether to follow history or make it.

PERESTROIKA UP CLOSE

by Robert Rand

Eight months in the Soviet capital left me convinced that *perestroika*, Gorbachev's "restructuring" of the Soviet economy, remains a phantom. It has not yet touched the average Russian. If a political rival to Gorbachev were to look his countrymen square in the eye and ask, as Ronald Reagan once did in a somewhat different context, "Are you better off now than you were three years ago?", the answer would be a reverberating "No."

Perestroika is, as Soviet citizens themselves like to say, "*vsyo na bumage*"—all on paper. They can read about it in newspapers or follow its purported course on television (a show called "The Projector of Perestroika" is a popular evening's entertainment on Moscow's Channel One), but the plain truth is that they can't reach out and touch it. Its absence, in the presence of promises to the contrary, makes perestroika, in the view of many Muscovites, yet another in a long series of empty political slogans promulgated from on high. "It's a meatless bone tossed out to a hungry dog," said one acquaintance, whose Party membership card did not preclude editorial comments about perestroika's shortcomings.

The failure of perestroika jumps out and touches the Moscow resident day in and day out like a persistent itch that won't go away. The more *Moskvichi* scratch and claw in frustration at the bankruptcy of it all, the more irritated they become.

Take the Moscow telephone system. Perestroika hasn't affected that. My resentment toward the slogans of perestroika, in fact, first began to fester after an abortive

attempt to telephone an acquaintance from a public phone booth (called an *avtomat*, a contradiction in terms). Lifting a Soviet handset and dialing a number is no guarantee you'll actually be able to telecommunicate. Several factors must coalesce. The rotary dial—there are no push button phones—must be tightly screwed in to ensure smooth, bump-free dialing. The coin slot (a phone call costs two kopecks, or about three cents) must be in proper working order, ready to gulp down the inserted coin at the right moment: a premature gulp in mid-dialing means you've been had. And, if you pass these two hurdles without incident, the phone lines mustn't cross: in Moscow there is an even chance that a correctly dialed number nonetheless may rouse the wrong party. Finally, if you have managed to reach the intended recipient of your call, there is the question of audibility. Telecommunication often means shouting into the receiver in order to be heard or straining to catch the reply.

Do this exercise for a few months (or years, as Soviet telephone users must) and see if you don't develop an inclination to question perestroika. Arguably, a modern economic giant runs on its telephones. The Soviet Union is still crawling.

Take food shopping, that perennial bugaboo of Soviet life. Perestroika will not succeed unless the Soviet Union's grocery shelves can be kept well-stocked: Gorbachev himself would acknowledge that. But 70 years after the revolution, purchasing the nutritional necessities of life in the Soviet capital remains no easy task. Citizens routinely carry *pakety*, or plastic sacks, like

sidearms, always at hand to bag that prized item they may come upon unexpectedly during commutes through the city.

During my tenure in Moscow, state stores simply did not have reliable supplies of fruits, vegetables, meats, milk products, and other commodities. Sugar, for instance, vanished from the Soviet capital last spring; it was said to be hoarded by moonshiners who needed the stuff to make home-brewed vodka. Sales of officially sanctioned liquor were revived as part of Gorbachev's anti-alcoholism campaign. Cheese—real cheese, that is—was also among the items intermittently out of reach. "Cheese of Friendship," however, a processed product wrapped in silvery foil and resembling Cheezwhiz in taste and in texture, was always available at the local cheese store.

Salad makings were hard to come by. Cucumbers, for some reason, were always around town. Tomatoes were coquettish in their availability, and green peppers were downright flirtatious, unpredictably appearing in this store or that.

I was surprised to find that mushrooms, the stuff of Stroganoff sauce and other Slavic delights, were almost impossible to find. Their arrival one day last spring in my neighborhood food store immediately generated a line of buyers. I queued up, *paket* at the ready, only to be informed once I reached the head of the line after a ten-minute wait: "I'm sorry, comrade, it's time for our lunch break and we'll resume selling mushrooms in one hour's time."

The supply of fruit was equally unpredictable. Apples (from Hungary) and oranges (from Egypt) appeared from time to time, but never simultaneously. Citrus

juices (from Cuba) made a nice fresh fruit alternative, but you never knew when they would appear. Bananas (from where I do not know) were once reported to be on sale near Moscow State University, that towering monument-to-Stalin on the banks of the Moscow River that I called home. By the time I tracked that rumor down not even the peels remained.

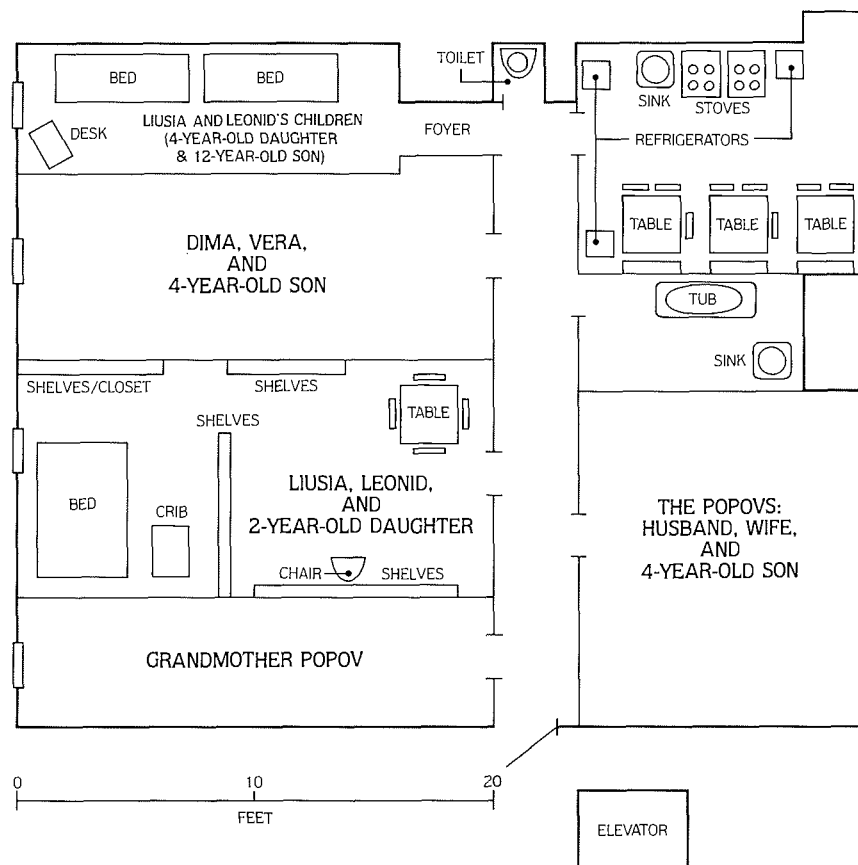
The Moscow resident develops a genuine appreciation for the fraternal socialist countries when it comes to food shopping. The smaller Warsaw Pact nations may be militarily dependent on the Kremlin, but in appeal to the palate, perestroika can't match what the East Europeans have to offer. Bulgarian ketchup (as good as Heinz—Soviets use it as spaghetti sauce) and Hungarian vegetables, compotes, and yams (all in jars with reuseable lids, a bit of modern technology that still eludes Soviet manufacturers) are snatched up as soon as they reach the markets. So are frozen brussels sprouts, carrots and peas from Poland, when available.

Frozen vegetables are sold, albeit intermittently, in plastic bags at selected ice cream stands. It took me three months to discover that.

Soviet consumers, by the way, *can* find a wide selection of fruits, vegetables and meats at the handful of farmer's markets located throughout Moscow. But the prices, which the merchants set themselves, are steep, beyond the range of most people. I spent eight rubles (over 12 dollars) one winter day for four apples.

Perestroika has not impressed Dima. Or Leonid. Or Vera or Liusia. Or of any of the twelve residents who live in the fifth floor apartment at the southern tip of Moscow's

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Baumansky region near the Kremlin.

Home for these middle-class folks is a *kommunalka*, or communal apartment, a cramped living space whose very existence—20 percent of the USSR's urban population lives in them—makes clear that housing ranks high on the long list of “deficit items” in the Soviet Union.

The Baumansky *kommunalka* is a five bedroom, one kitchen, one bathroom affair (no a/c, w/d). It houses three unrelated family units (or four, if you consider the family of mice in the kitchen.) The bedrooms, which double as living rooms, branch off from both sides of a long, partially lit hallway. The layout:

- Dima, a scientist, and his wife Vera, both around thirty, live in one bedroom with their four-year-old son. When I last saw them, they were expecting the birth of

a second child—but not the receipt of expanded living quarters.

- Leonid, a freelance journalist, and his wife Liusia, both in their mid-thirties, occupy two rooms: they sleep in one with their two-year-old daughter, while the other has beds for a second daughter, age 4, and a 12-year-old son.

- A third family, the Popovs—husband, wife, four-year-old son, and grandmother—occupies the remaining two bedrooms.

The rooms vary in size. Leonid and Liusia's bedroom is approximately 20' x 10'. A bookcase splits the room in half, with bed and crib on one side and dining room table on the other. Their daughter and son are in cramped quarters, large enough to hold two child-size single beds, but not much more.

All 12 people share the austere bathroom (one toilet, one sink, one bathtub) and kitchen facilities; three miniature refrigerators (called "Frosties") and two four-burner gas stoves provide a bit of flexibility.

Dima, Vera, Leonid, and Liusia spend most evenings holding court around the rickety wooden kitchen table, downing cup after cup of boiling hot tea, nibbling on sweets that Liusia, an accomplished cook, has prepared. They swat at cockroaches (not in short supply) and discuss the course of current Soviet life. The other adult residents of the *kommunalka*, the Popovs, do not join them, pointedly shunning communal activities as a result of a still unhealed quarrel that took place last year over who-was-supposed-to-pay-what-share of an electric bill. Estrangement between *kommunalka* cohabitants is not uncommon.

The kitchen gatherings, which are duplicated each evening in countless other Moscow households, have the air of a judicial hearing whose participants are simultaneously lawyer, judge, witness, and jury: presenting, probing, arguing, and evaluating evidence drawn from each day's experiences in an effort to sort out what Gorbachev's reform movement really means. The criteria are personal and straightforward: Gorbachev's policies are measured on the basis of whether one's living conditions have improved. At the Baumansky *kommunalka* they have not. Perestroika, the apartment residents say, has passed them by.

"I think things are as bad or actually worse than before," said Liusia. Her bill of particulars one day late last spring began with a report on Soviet plumbing.

"We haven't had hot water for a month," she said. She explained that each year, in late May or June, the pipes providing Moscow's nine million residents with hot running water are cleaned and repaired. To do the job, the plumbing authori-

ties simply turn off the tap, one city region at a time. "I haven't bathed in days" Liusia said; she lacked the courage to face, after four weeks, another tub full of cold water.

(My dormitory bathroom at Moscow University went without hot water for 22 days beginning June 1. My frustration intensified during that period, but I learned, while taking icy showers, to stifle my screams so as not to draw attention.)

"Food is harder to come by," Liusia continued. "The shops are as poorly stocked as ever." She said she fills her days under Gorbachev as she did in the days preceding perestroika: she forages, shuffling from one food store to another, all in search of the supplies she needs to prepare meals for her family of five.

As a mother of three, Liusia is the beneficiary of certain privileges available to "many-child mothers" in the Soviet Union. Women with three or more offspring are given the right to purchase certain commodities, notably meat, without waiting in line, and are entitled to preference in obtaining scarce durable goods, such as household appliances. Liusia complains that the chronic shortages make the privileges illusory, and that perestroika, for her, will exist only when this illusion becomes reality.

"We've been on a priority waiting list to buy a washing machine for over a year now," Liusia said. Meanwhile, her family's laundry is done by hand and hung out to dry on clotheslines that fill the kitchen's upper reaches.

A major recent event in Liusia's life centered on the receipt of another deficit item: a handheld electric mixmaster. The *mikser*, as it's called in Russian, was made in West Germany and purchased by a foreign visitor at one of the *beryozki*, or hard currency stores, that are off limits to the average Soviet citizen. "Vera, come look!" Liusia

squealed after receiving the item. "A *mikser*! What a gift! Now I won't have to break my arms any more, and think of all the time I'll save!" She cradled the blender like a new-born baby, and took turns with Vera punching its on-off button, gleefully watching the machine's attachments whiz and whir.

"Is she pleased with the gift?" Leonid was asked.

"More than pleased," he said. "She's enchanted."

Enchanted is not the word Dima would use to describe his view of life in the Baumansky *kommunalka*. With a new baby on the horizon, he and Vera are dissatisfied with their one room. Gorbachev's stated goal of providing every Soviet family with its own apartment by the end of the century means little to Dima; he and Vera need more space now.

They have thought about trying to move into larger quarters. But a rigid set of Soviet rules and practices restricts the number of people eligible for new housing. Eligibility hinges on the number of square meters of living space an individual occupies: if you live in Moscow and you enjoy more than approximately eleven square meters of living space (about 120 square feet: the size of a 10' x 12' room), the state will not assign you a larger apartment. Even if you meet the eligibility requirements, as Dima's family will once their new child is born, a wait of two, three, four years lies ahead before new accommodations become available. Other avenues exist to obtain better housing quicker, but these often require a layout of large sums of money for bribes and black market payments to circumvent the system. Such illegal "speculation" is widespread; Dima, due to scruples or lack of funds, chose not to dabble in it.

Dima was seemingly without recourse. Until, that is, he realized that the only way to see perestroika was to build it himself.

And that's exactly what he did. With hammer, nails, and a bundle of two-by-fours, Dima restructured his living quarters. What was once a plain, one-level *kommunalka* living space became a fashionable two-level flat with loft. High ceilings made the project, whose legality is open to question, possible. Thanks to Dima, but not to Gorbachev, perestroika now lives in the Baumansky communal flat.

Across town, ask Marina about the fruits of perestroika and you'll get a sigh. A shake of the head. A flash of anger. Marina is the 84-year-old matriarch of a family that has tried but failed to improve its quality of life through perestroika.

Marina and her husband have their own one-bedroom apartment in the southwest section of Moscow. Her daughter, Tanya, son-in-law Sergei, and two grandsons live on the other side of town in a one-bedroom place that Marina's mother once occupied. The family, like most that I encountered in Moscow, is tightly knit, almost interdependent. It's all for one and one for all in a common struggle to survive the vagaries of Soviet life.

Perestroika provided Marina's clan with an opportunity to get ahead. In 1986, at Gorbachev's direction, the Soviet legislature passed a law that allowed citizens to operate what are essentially private business enterprises, called "cooperatives," in their free time. The premise behind the law was simple: labor productivity and the output of high quality goods and services were likely to rise when workers ran their own shops and shared in the business's profits. Cooperatives, which would coexist with state-run enterprises, were meant to benefit the worker (called a *kooperator*) and consumer alike.

Some 48,000 cooperative enterprises now exist in Gorbachev's Russia. More than 3,000 of them are in Moscow. They include

restaurants, flower shops, clothing boutiques, bakeries, repair services, and other enterprises. They are managed without state interference: the cooperative directors determine the prices charged for the enterprise's product. The prices are higher than those in state-run businesses. But the item or service purchased is usually superior to that available in government shops.

Some Soviet consumers, those who can afford to pay, have benefited from this aspect of perestroika. A citizen willing to part with forty rubles (about \$64 at the official exchange rate) to buy dinner for two at "Kropotkinskaia 36," Mos-

cow's best known cooperative restaurant, will go home a satisfied customer, the recipient of attentive service and first-rate food, amenities not available at cheaper state-operated feeding places.

But most Muscovites I met stayed away from the cooperatives. They were simply too expensive. That 40-ruble dinner tab equals nearly one-quarter of the average worker's monthly wage. Forty-ruble T-shirts with Western-style logos on them, or blue jeans with 110 ruble (\$178) price tags, all on sale at one clothing cooperative I visited, are also inaccessible. A sizeable number of Soviets hold cooperatives in contempt and view *kooperatory* as bandits



Last September, Muscovites lined up with their sacks to buy melons on Kalinin Prospekt, one of the Soviet capital's major streets. It was the best month for fresh fruit.

intent on gouging the comrades for all they're worth. For the common man or woman who cannot afford the high prices, cooperatives, and perestroika, are for the privileged, not for the masses.

But almost everyone can afford 10 kopecks (\$0.16). That's what it costs to visit one of the cooperative public toilets that have sprung up in Moscow. In this service industry, Sergei, Marina's 33-year-old son-in-law, a man of ambition and business acumen, saw a limitless market and sensed an opportunity.

The pay-as-you-go concept is certainly alien to Soviet culture. Not, strictly speaking, the kind of revolutionary idea Lenin had in mind when he ushered in the Communist era. But the pedestrian heeding nature's call is treated to an uncommonly antiseptic experience, all for a nominal fee.

Out of curiosity one day last winter, I dropped by one of the facilities, located in the Paveletsky train station in central Moscow. The station, originally constructed under Tsar Nicholas II in 1900 and renovated in 1980, is a cavernous, rectangular building with a flowery, art nouveau facade; its trains connect Moscow with towns on the middle and lower regions of the Volga River. A 1920s movie scene: old, weary faces and stocky peasant bodies. Many travelers are loaded down with cheap suitcases and bulky burlap sacks. These folk are the villagers and farmers who, from hundreds of miles away, regularly visit the capital to purchase food, clothing and other goods that are not available elsewhere. Moscow may suffer shortages of consumer items, but it is a cornucopia for those who transit Paveletsky.

The travelers had their choice of two separate cooperative bathrooms in the station when I saw them. Both were tidy and well maintained. One had Soviet muzak piped in. Two bewildered men were seen exiting that facility with wide grins on their

faces. "Music! Can you believe it?" said one. "It's like being in Paris!"

The other bathroom, located nearby, was not audio equipped. But the walls were nicely tiled and there were automatic hand-dryers next to the sinks (the hand-dryers didn't work, but the thought was nice). The urinals in the place shone. "My god," said a wide-eyed elderly man as he entered the bathroom after depositing a 10-kopeck coin in a wooden box, "those things are as smooth and bright as eggshells!"

Sergei entered the cooperative public bathroom business at the invitation of a friend who operated the Paveletsky facility. Sergei cleaned toilets. It was unpleasant work that demanded virtually all of his free time. Marina and Tanya, while cheering Sergei on, were embarrassed by what he was doing and kept his activities secret from family acquaintances.

Sergei's toil soon began to pay off. Sharing in the proceeds, he was bringing in money, more money, he said, than he had ever earned as a teacher, his official profession. He had cashed in on perestroika.

Nevertheless, Sergei and his family weren't pleased. Perestroika gave them a burgeoning bank account. But one can't buy what doesn't exist. In effect, the chronic shortage of consumer goods left his new assets frozen. Financially, Sergei was all dressed up with no place to go.

What Sergei wanted most was a car. Wheels. Something to ease the burden of life a bit. Money wasn't at issue. He could afford the 10,000 rubles (\$16,000) it would cost to buy a new Soviet-made (the only option) model—a Moskvich or Zhiguli. No problem. But automobiles were not to be found. Adding his name to the official waiting list to purchase a car was out of the question, he said, because delivery would be ten or more years down the road.

Sergei was not a patient man. He decided to try the black market in autos, where private vendors sell vehicles with pricetags that exceed official levels. But, when I last saw him, he had come up empty-handed. Marina and Tanya got into the act by concocting a scheme: Marina's brother, who lives in Washington, would purchase a Soviet-built car in the United States and then have it shipped to Sergei in Moscow. They were disappointed to learn that Soviet-built cars haven't flooded the American market.

The whole episode angered Marina, who seemed to take personal offense at perestroika's inability to satisfy the family's consumer expectations. She was upset because her son-in-law's hard work could not be converted into something tangible. "We don't want for money," she said bitterly. They lacked a change in their daily lives, the kind of change that Gorbachev had yet to deliver.

Yet Gorbachev has delivered one thing that makes perestroika's shortcomings easier for the Soviet citizen to endure, and that's *glasnost*, popularly defined as "openness." Soviet newspaper readers and television viewers—the *glasnost* consumer—have been bombarded by tales of social ills, official corruption and economic maladministration. These revelations have shaken old notions of public information and debate. They have been bolts of electric shock therapy, leaving the public with blinking eyes, variously astounded, confused, pleased, and angered at the latest revelation, and always thirsting for more. Hardly a week went by during my stay in Moscow without the Soviet media exposing the scandalous behavior of some government bureaucrat or Party official. The goal of such publicity—"publicity" is in fact the

real meaning of *glasnost*—was, by force of example and threat of accountability, to stamp out mismanagement and arbitrariness as distinctive features of Soviet life. *Glasnost* is, in this sense, the cutting edge of perestroika; the "sharp weapon of restructuring," as a recent Communist Party decree declared, designed to soften up the thick barriers to Gorbachev's reforms.

Glasnost has energized those late night kitchen table discussions, giving Dima, Vera, Leonid, Liusia, and millions of others more grist for debate than they ever imagined possible. Soviets have always grumbled about the system's self-inflicted difficulties. But in the "epoch of non-*glasnost*," as one of the Baumansky apartment dwellers called the pre-Gorbachev era, they did so quietly, resignedly, without hope. Now, thanks to *glasnost*, it's not only permissible to criticize, but you can, within limits, do so publicly. There are even radio call-in shows that air citizen's complaints about the system's shortcomings.

Those grave shortcomings, of course, still exist. *Glasnost* alone will not restructure the Soviet Union. Openness has not put meat, fruits and vegetables on the grocery shelves. Life remains, under perestroika as before, a struggle beyond the ken of most Americans. Some Soviets claim that things are even worse. But at least the citizenry has the satisfaction of knowing that rose-colored glasses are less likely now than at any time since 1917 to shade the Kremlin's version of the truth. Optimism, not indifference, infuses those kitchen discussions; a country whose leaders are prepared to acknowledge that problems exist is a country that at least has a chance of solving some of them.

As Marina put it: "Life has become more difficult, but at least we can breathe easier."

BACKGROUND BOOKS

REFORM IN RUSSIA

The origins of the first Russian state remain a mystery. Scholars differ over whether the early *Rus'* people were descended from Nordic invaders or tribal Slavs from southern Russia, as Nicholas Riasanovsky notes in **A History of Russia** (Oxford, 1984). What is clear is that the *Rus'* were first united by the warrior-princes of Kiev during the ninth century. One of these princes, Vladimir (980–1015), converted the Kievan *Rus'* to Orthodox Christianity in 988, "thus opening the gates for the highly developed Byzantine culture to enter Russia."

James H. Billington's **The Icon and the Axe** (Random, 1970) chronicles the disintegration of the Kievan state under Mongol occupation (1240–1380), and the emergence of Moscow as a center of national leadership. Although Russia's key institutions—the tsarist autocracy, landed gentry, and the rural serfs—took shape during the Muscovite period, the most important unifying force in Medieval Muscovy was the Russian Orthodox Church. Deeply influenced by "radical monasticism" and by a popular myth identifying Moscow as the Third Rome, Billington writes, "Muscovy at the time of its rise to greatness resembled an expectant revivalist camp." Orthodox monasticism stimulated a rich culture, but it also largely isolated Muscovy from the West and from the effects of the social and economic transformations of modern Europe. Robert Crummey's **The Formation of Muscovy: 1304–1613** (Longman, 1987) is a detailed history of early Muscovite society.

Russia's imperial pe-

riod brought a new interest in modernization. Tsar Peter I (1682–1725) created a Governing Senate, a network of bureaucratic ministries, and a system of state-sponsored education. B. H. Sumner, in **Peter the Great and the Emergence of Russia** (Macmillan, 1962) argues that Peter, despite his fascination with Western Europe, was a patriot who hoped to transform Russia into an international power.

Catherine the Great (1762–96) prided herself on her affinity for the French Enlightenment and her friendship with Voltaire, but she presided over the consolidation of the gentry's privileges and suppression of the Pugachev peasant rebellion in 1773. Alexander Radishchev, an exiled intellectual, described the serfs' plight in **A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow** (Harvard, 1958), asking: "Can a country in which two-thirds of the citizens are deprived of their civil rights, and to some extent are dead to the law, be called happy?"

Except for the short-lived interest of Alexander I (1801–1825) in constitutional revision, autocracy reigned in Russia until 1861. Following the shock of defeat in the Crimean War, Alexander II (1855–1881) introduced an array of judicial and administrative reforms, notably the emancipation of the serfs. Daniel Field, in **The End of Serfdom** (Harvard, 1976), observes that Alexander II's "Great Reforms" paved the way for Russia's belated industrialization, but left the Russian peasant financially destitute.

By the turn of the century, the Russian empire reached to Po-



AN EMIGRÉ'S VIEW

Western analysts should not blame contradictions in current Soviet policy on some imagined "conservatives-versus-reformers" struggle, contended emigré author Vladimir Bukovsky in The Washington Quarterly (Winter '89). He wrote:

"The [domestic] problems that the Soviet leaders have to solve simply have no solutions. One can hardly expect significant improvements resulting from any within-the-system reforms because the very idea of this [Soviet] system has outlived itself. The only way to liberate the economy . . . is to introduce a full-fledged market economy The only way to reduce the role of the Communist Party is to allow a multi-party system But then there will be no Soviet Union as it is known, no Communist Party, no general secretary, and no need for *perestroika* and *glasnost* because they are superfluous"

land, the Black Sea, the Pacific, and Turkestan, encompassing scores of nationalities and religious groups. According to Sheila Fitzpatrick in **The Russian Revolution** (Oxford, 1984), although Russia remained largely rural, it was beginning to feel the effects of early industrialization: An influx of impoverished peasants swelled the ranks of a small but militant urban working class and labor unrest fueled the revolutionary ambitions of Russia's radical intelligentsia.

World War I brought Russia repeated military defeats. Combined with Nicholas II's disregard for the parliament he had established in 1906, they "threw the anachronistic traits of the Russian aristocracy into sharp relief, and made Nicholas seem less like an upholder of the autocratic tradition than an unwilling satirist of it," writes Fitzpatrick. The Tsar's life is chronicled by Robert Massie in **Nicholas and Alexandra** (Atheneum, 1967).

Finally, as Russia's armies collapsed under German attack, the old regime gave way in February 1917 to Alexander Kerensky's Provisional Government, and eventually to Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Communist John Reed's **Ten Days that Shook the World** (International, 1967) is a vivid, admiring portrait of the

Bolshevik coup of October 1917. A scholarly account is Adam Ulam's **Bolsheviks** (Macmillan, 1968), while Richard Pipes, in **The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism** (Harvard, 1964), takes the drama from 1917 to the end of the bloody "Red" versus "White" civil war five years later.

The Bolsheviks quickly took over industry and finance, but persistent food shortages compelled Lenin to declare a "retreat" in 1921. Under his New Economic Policy, private traders could sell foodstuffs, small-scale private farming was encouraged, and some private industrial production was permitted. Stephen Cohen, in **Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution** (Oxford, 1980), argues that the NEP represented not merely a "retreat," but an alternative approach advocated by Bolshevik ideologist Nikolai Bukharin. The Soviet economy's evolution into a clumsy heavyweight from the NEP through the Brezhnev era is traced by Alec Nove in **An Economic History of the USSR** (Penguin, 1972).

Stalin's rise to power after Lenin's death in 1924 is chronicled by Roy Medvedev, a Soviet historian, in **Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism** (Knopf, 1971). "Stalin broke all records for political terror," writes Medvedev. "In 1936-39, on the most cautious estimates, four to five million people were subjected to repression for political reasons," while the peasantry was decimated during the forced collectivization of agriculture.

Medvedev argues that Stalinism was a "perversion" of the teachings of Marx and Lenin. But others, such as Merle Fainsod in **How Russia is Ruled** (Harvard, 1963) and Robert Conquest in **The Harvest of Sorrow** (Oxford, 1986), point out that Lenin, in fact, introduced key elements of Stalinism—the secret police, the use of terror, and party conformity. Robert Tucker supplies the classic profile of **Stalin as Revolutionary: 1879-1929. A Study in History and Personality** (Norton, 1973), while Arthur Koestler's novel, **Darkness at Noon** (Modern Library, 1956), and Alexander Solzhenitsyn's **The Gulag Archipelago: 1918-1956. An Experiment in Literary Investigation** (Harper & Row, 1974-75) chronicle the

terror from the victims' point of view.

"Not until 1956 could we rid ourselves of the psychological after-effects," says Nikita Khrushchev in **Khrushchev Remembers** (Little, Brown, 1974). The cathartic event was his own "secret speech," denouncing Stalin before the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in Moscow. Khrushchev introduced "destalinization"—the easing of police repression, a literary "thaw," and a revival of intra-Party debate—that lasted until Khrushchev's ouster in 1964.

Leonid Brezhnev (1964–1982) inaugurated what Mikhail Gorbachev now describes as an "era of stagnation." Andrei Amalrik, a dissident imprisoned by Brezhnev, describes the regime's heavy hand in **Notes of a Revolutionary** (Knopf, 1982). Yet Amalrik's work also testifies to the survival of irrepressible networks of dissent in the Soviet Union.

Although the Soviets attained military superpower status during the 1960s, Brezhnev and Co. commanded a civilian economy beset by shortages, low productivity, and technological backwardness, according to Bruce Parrott's **Politics and Technology in the Soviet Union** (MIT, 1985). Blair Ruble and Arcadius Kahan's **Industrial Labor in the USSR** (Pergamon, 1979) shows that "the Soviet worker in the mid-

1970s enjoyed a standard of living not unlike that of the American worker in the 1920s."

Nevertheless, economist Ed Hewett in **The Politics of Reform: Equality versus Efficiency** (Brookings, 1988) contends that by the time Gorbachev came to power in 1985 "the Soviet system could boast many successes." In particular, he says, it guaranteed full employment and a fairly egalitarian wage structure. Reform, Hewett predicts, will necessarily erode the average worker's financial security. Gorbachev's success will depend on his ability to "[dilute] the egalitarian basis of the system . . . without jeopardizing the very foundations of the Party's legitimacy."

For his part, Jerry Hough, in **Russia and the West: Gorbachev and the Politics of Reform** (Simon and Schuster, 1988), argues that Gorbachev's *perestroika* is analogous to the American New Deal—it is meant to rescue the Soviet system without "replacing basic political and economic institutions." Gorbachev's greatest difficulty, according to Hough, will be resisting pressures for more radical change.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: For related titles, see Background Books essays in "The Soviet Union" (WQ, Winter '77), "The Soviet Future" (Winter '81), "The Soviets" (Autumn '83), "Soviet Life" (Autumn '85), and "Soviets and Americans" (New Year's '89).

The most up-to-date discussion is in specialized journals. Prominent Soviet sociologist Tatyana Zaslavskaya's "Novosibirsk Document" (Survey, Spring, '84) accused Soviet workers of indifference and passivity, blaming central planners for being "tuned, not to stimulate but to thwart the population's useful activity." In 1987, Soviet economist Nikolai Shmelyov called for radical reforms—of prices and currency—in his influential article "New Worries" in Novy Mir (trans. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Report Annex, April 22, 1988).

Western analyses include Soviet Economy's special issue on last summer's "Nineteenth Party Congress of the CPSU" (July-Sept., '88), Gertrude Schroeder's "Gorbachev: 'Radically' Implementing Brezhnev's Reforms" (Soviet Economy, Oct.-Dec., '86), and Peter Hauslohner's "Gorbachev's Social Contract" (Soviet Economy, Jan.-March, '87). "Gorbachev and Glasnost," a special issue of Survey (Oct., '88) features Peter Reddaway and Richard Pipes on political reform and its historical precedents.