

The Collapse of the Soviet System and the Memoir Literature

Author(s): Michael Ellman and Vladimir Kontorovich

Source: *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Mar., 1997), pp. 259-279

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/153987>

Accessed: 06-01-2019 10:59 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Taylor & Francis, Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Europe-Asia Studies*

The Collapse of the Soviet System and the Memoir Literature

MICHAEL ELLMAN & VLADIMIR KONTOROVICH

Question to Gorbachev in Rotterdam in 1995: ‘How long could the old system have survived if it had not been for your activity?’

Answer of Gorbachev: ‘A long time, and it would have improved, especially with me at the head. I could peacefully have remained General Secretary up to the year 2000.’

Pravda, 7 June 1995

Memoirs: pitfalls and payoff

SINCE ‘...*perestroika* was begun by a very narrow circle in the leadership of the party and state...’ (Yakovlev, 1992, p. 268), individual motives and perceptions are crucial for understanding the event. Archives, interviews and memoirs are the main sources of evidence on such matters. This article is based on a selective reading of the memoir literature published before mid-1996.¹

It is important to separate the accounts in memoirs which are based on direct knowledge and experience from second-hand information and theorising, which may be interesting, but are not as valuable as the former. Furthermore, memoirs are written by (or in the name of) people anxious to present a favourable picture of their role in events which have taken place and to discredit that of their opponents. To deal with this, we have discounted criticism of an author’s opponents (e.g. El’tsin, 1994, p. 32, suggesting that by 1990 Gorbachev got tired of *perestroika*). Recognition of an opponent’s positive steps has greater credibility (e.g. El’tsin, 1994, pp. 85, 131, noting that the plotters of the August 1991 coup recoiled at shedding blood).

Distortions of fact occur even when no interest is at stake. When primary records have been lost or destroyed inaccurate memories or fantasies may be substituted.² Even when records exist, memoirists may make mistakes. For example, according to Ryzhkov, Gorbachev’s appointment as General Secretary was proposed by Gromyko and approved by the Politburo on 10 March 1995, the day of Chernenko’s death (Ryzhkov, 1992, pp. 78–79). Yet according to Ligachev this happened at a second Politburo meeting on 11 March (Ligachev, 1992, pp. 57–67).³ The extensive detail provided by Ligachev, his position at the time as the Party Secretary responsible for personnel, and corroboration by Vorotnikov (1995, pp. 56–57) and Boldin (1994, pp. 58–61) suggest that Ligachev’s version is the accurate one.⁴

Such cross-checking of the sources does not always work. The same Politburo meetings described by Chernyaev (1993) and Vorotnikov (1995) sometimes sound very different.⁵ Distortions may result from the use of poorly informed ghost-writers and attempts to tailor the text for commercial success.⁶ Finally, memoirs may mislead not only by what they say but also by what they omit. Even apart from the sensitive issues, memoirs do not address some important topics, and deal with others (e.g. economics) inadequately. Therefore one cannot hope to get 'the whole story' of collapse from the memoirs, only answers to some questions.

The scene: the USSR in the eyes of its rulers

The General Secretaries and their economists

Open Soviet economic debate in the early 1980s largely avoided all the topics that should have been its greatest concern: the slow-down of economic growth, inflation, and the technological gap with the West. But the top echelons of the Soviet leadership had been getting confidential reports critical of the economy's performance since at least the 1960s. Some were initiated by individual economists, such as the 1969 Mikhalevsky and Shatalin report to Gosplan criticising the official statistics on the rate of change of retail prices and of real incomes (Shatalin, 1992). Others were written by official agencies, such as the 1975 Gosplan report to the CC warning about the serious economic problems which had accumulated and suggesting measures for overcoming them. Around 1977 Gosplan prepared a report pointing out that about half the increase in recorded output of food and light industries was achieved by means of quality deterioration (Baibakov, 1993, pp. 126, 128–133). Still other reports were commissioned by the rulers themselves. Thus in 1979 and 1980 the Politburo instructed a task force headed by the Chairman of the State Committee on Science and Technology, Academician Kirillin, to prepare two reports on increasing the efficiency of the Soviet economy. Hundreds of people from a variety of institutions were involved in the effort (Shatalin, 1992).

While all the rulers of the 1970s and 1980s had access to information painting a bleaker picture of the economy than the official one, they read these reports differently. Mikhalevsky and Shatalin got into trouble; Gosplan's 1975 report was rejected by Brezhnev at a Politburo meeting (Shatalin, 1992; Baibakov, 1993, p. 126). Gosplan's 1977 report was discussed at a meeting of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers, where it met hostility, and no action was taken on it. The two Kirillin reports were ignored (Shatalin, 1992).⁷

Brezhnev's successor, by contrast, was eager to learn about the economy's problems. In the late 1970s he appeared to be unaware of the Soviet technological lag behind the West (Kalugin, 1995, pp. 252–253). Yet shortly before he moved from the KGB to the CC in May 1982 he ordered three reports from an economist well known for his unorthodox views. After becoming General Secretary he also sought the opinion of academic experts in other fields (Shatalin, 1992).⁸ A few days after Andropov became Secretary General in November 1982, he arranged for Ryzhkov to be elected a CC Secretary and appointed him head of the newly created economic department of the CC. Gorbachev and Ryzhkov quickly began taking advice from the

leading economists and managers of factories and farms (Ryzhkov, 1992, pp. 46–49).⁹ They were soon drafting decrees on economic changes and organising economic experiments.

Soviet rulers had access to information and analysis painting a bleaker economic picture than the official one. However, this information in itself did not predetermine a course of action.

The international position of the USSR

The memoirs make it clear that the perceived military threat to the USSR was an important part of Gorbachev's inheritance.

The placing of the US Pershing missiles in Western Europe seems to have been more successful in scaring the Soviet rulers than their own economists' secret memoranda: '...the Kremlin élite was paranoid about the technical capability attributed to Pershing rockets' (Sagdeev, 1994, p. 256). Around 1981 Andropov sent an 'apocalyptic' circular to all branches of the KGB which included the words: 'Never since the end of the [great patriotic] war has the international situation been so explosive as now...' (Kalugin, 1995, p. 276).

While still head of the KGB, Andropov did believe that the Reagan administration was actively preparing for war, and he was joined in this belief by Ustinov, the defence minister. They persuaded the Politburo to approve the largest peacetime military intelligence operation in Soviet history...In 1983 all KGB residents received urgent and detailed instructions to collect any evidence of plans for an American first strike.

When SDI was announced, the Soviet leadership '...was convinced that the great technical potential of the United States had scored again and treated Reagan's statement as a real threat' (Dobrynin, 1995, pp. 522–532).¹⁰

Such a strong reaction could be expected to have significant repercussions for the country's military and economic policy. The memoirists, however, are silent on this issue, not least because they know so little: '...all the activities in the security sector were top secret...Not even most Politburo members were fully informed because the Defence Ministry and the Defence Industry Ministry [*sic*] were only accountable to the General Secretary, who was also commander in chief and chairman of the Defence Council' (Dobrynin, 1995, p. 474). In the late Brezhnev period the level and rate of growth of military expenditure were exclusively the preserve of the General Secretary. Senior figures such as the chairman of Gosplan or a Politburo member such as Gorbachev were unable even to discuss their level (Gorbachev, 1995b, p. 198).

This should be borne in mind when evaluating the statements on military topics by even the highest officials. Thus the memoirists, both critical and supportive of Gorbachev, agree with Marshal Akhromeev (Akhromeev & Kornienko, 1992, pp. 314–315) that 'the USSR was not able to continue after 1985 the military confrontation with the USA and NATO. The economic possibilities for such a policy were exhausted'. It is not clear, however, to what degree this represents contemporary opinion based on hard information, or is merely an *ex post* rationalisation. There is no agreement among the sources as to the exact magnitude of the burden of defence, which should further fuel our suspicion.¹¹ There is a consensus that whatever the

burden was, it was too high. Some memoirists theorise that socialism, Marxism, the ‘command-administrative’ system and Brezhnev were none of them primarily responsible for Soviet economic backwardness, which was mainly the result of the economic burden resulting from the cold war (Pavlov, 1993, pp. 13–16; Shakhnazarov, 1993, chapter 6). This stress on policy rather than system is unfashionable, but there is much to be said for it.

The former ambassador to the USA disagrees. ‘Sadly for the ardent followers of Reagan, the increased Soviet defence spending provoked by Reagan’s policies was not the straw that broke the back of the evil empire’ (Dobrynin, 1995, p. 611). There may be an institutional bias at work here, with former diplomats suggesting that the biggest direct impact of Reagan’s rearmament programme in general and of SDI in particular was to increase Soviet willingness to reach agreements with the USA on disarmament (Dobrynin, 1995, *passim*; Akhromeev & Kornienko, 1992, *passim*). This, of course, does not contradict the importance of the burden of defence.

General perceptions of the situation

Even the memoirists bemoaning the result of Gorbachev’s policies do not claim that the system should have been left as it existed in 1985. They point out a variety of needed improvements, both economic and political.¹² On the other hand, there is little sense of urgency in their proposals. The notion that the country was approaching an economic crisis, overcoming which required major changes, was first formulated in official documents circulated to Politburo members in April 1987, as part of the preparation for the June 1987 CC Plenum on economic reform (Gorbachev, 1995b, p. 349).

Sources from the opposing sides of the political divide tell us that ‘neither in the beginning nor in the middle of the 1980s was there any question of political instability’ (Pavlov, 1994); ‘...neither I, nor my colleagues, evaluated the general situation at that time as one of a crisis of the system’ (Gorbachev, 1995b, p. 208). Those who were worried about the situation thought that the difficulties could be overcome by appropriate within-system reforms, e.g. the Food Programme. In Yakovlev’s (1994, pp. 213, 239) words,

at that time [i.e. in 1985] there were no doubts in the party leadership about the stable and progressive nature of the socialist system. It was precisely in that atmosphere that *perestroika* was born, taking on the form of socio-economic “acceleration”...The idea of acceleration was not oriented to abrupt social changes...It was aimed to improve the system, to eliminate its particularly intolerable manifestations. The dominating opinion was that in the huge organism [of the socialist system] it was necessary to turn on some “taps” and to turn off others, to replace this and to repair that, and then everything would go well.¹³

Gorbachev’s perception of the situation

As far as Gorbachev’s own personal perception of the pre-*perestroika* economic situation is concerned, this seems—according to his own account—to have been largely shaped by the situation in agriculture and by his foreign visits. Gorbachev was born in a village, worked as a boy on a farm, had a degree in agricultural economics,

from 1970 to 1978 was first secretary of the Stavropol regional party committee—Stavropol is an important agricultural region—and from 1978 was the member of the top leadership with responsibility for agriculture. He became the CC secretary for agriculture in 1978, candidate member of the Politburo in 1979, and full member in 1980, all the while retaining the agriculture portfolio. Referring to the period 1978–82 he has written (Gorbachev, 1995b, p. 185): ‘the relations between town and country, the fate of the peasantry, the land and the people on the land, the preservation of nature—these ancient questions did not give me any rest. The further I delved into them, the more I was overcome by alarm about the situation in the country, the more I began to doubt the wisdom of the economic policy being implemented in the country’. Bearing in mind the low living standards of the Soviet rural population, the substantial waste in Soviet agriculture, the inability of the USSR to feed itself, the ecological deterioration and the huge and rising cost of agricultural support, this is entirely understandable.

As far as Gorbachev’s pre-*perestroika* foreign visits are concerned, Gorbachev has described a number of the ones he made while first secretary of Stavropol region (Gorbachev, 1995b, pp. 155–170). He brought back with him the impression that with respect to living standards and the technological level the USSR lagged a long way behind Western Europe and that the Soviet leadership should do something to reduce this gap.

The main character: Gorbachev’s leadership style

We have already noticed how differently Andropov and Brezhnev treated the same economic information. Memoirs repeatedly indicate that the strategic direction of policy depended more on the leader’s ‘subjective’ inclinations than on any ‘objective’ factors. Thus, Andropov was ‘a typical for that time highly orthodox party person’ (Ryzhkov, 1992, p. 43).¹⁴ In Gorbachev’s opinion, had Andropov lived longer, he would not have embarked on the path of a radical transformation of the USSR (Gorbachev, 1995b, p. 247).¹⁵ In the late 1960s, A.N. Shelepin anticipated Andropov’s position on some policy issues, criticising Brezhnev’s weakness and calling for more discipline, a greater use of tough measures, and a greater hostility to the West (Aleksandrov-Agentov, 1994, pp. 253–257).¹⁶ Had Shelepin replaced Brezhnev, Soviet policy in many areas might have been significantly different from what it was. As another example, ‘imagine that the Politburo of the CC CPSU in March 1985 had chosen as General Secretary Grishin, Romanov or someone else from the “old guard”. One can assume that in that case the reform would have developed according to the “Chinese variant”, preserving both the Soviet Union and the bi-polar system of international relations...So much for determinism!’ (Shakhnazarov, 1993, p. 579). It is for this reason that Gorbachev’s personality matters.

Napoleon was fond of saying: ‘On s’engage et puis on voit’ (We’ll join battle and then we’ll see). This was once quoted by Lenin, in a passage that was well known in the USSR. A number of aides heard Gorbachev use the phrase.¹⁷ This impulsive, unplanned and improvised approach coexisted with the tendency to avoid hard decisions and paper over the differences among the strategies proposed by his advisers (Pankin, 1993, pp. 72–75; Pavlov, 1995, p. 133; Ryzhkov, 1995, p. 351;

Afanaseev, 1994, p. 100). According to Gaidar (1996, p. 59) Gorbachev's 'most serious weakness' was his 'inability to take necessary, even if risky, decisions and implement them'. In January 1990 many in the leadership were disturbed by the deterioration in the economic situation. At a stormy Politburo meeting on 29 January 1990 Slyunkov and Yakovlev put forward a radical programme for the rapid destruction of the traditional model and transition to the market, quite different from the more cautious proposals of Ryzhkov (Chernyaev, 1993, p. 332). Instead of backing one side or the other, Gorbachev instructed Ryzhkov to include 'elements' (which?) of the Slyunkov plan in his own plan. Gorbachev argued that the Ryzhkov plan was unsatisfactory but that the Slyunkov plan was too radical. His behaviour in this restricted forum was rather similar to his public behaviour later in the year over the rival merits of the Ryzhkov-Abalkin programme and the 500 days programme. This search for a verbal compromise, rather than attention to the details of economic policy, was quite different from the leadership styles of Stalin and Khrushchev.

Gorbachev 'associated decisiveness in politics with the decisiveness of his statements about politics' (Grachev, 1994a, p. 69). He neglected policy implementation (Onikov, 1996, p. 70). He was a poor organiser (Shakhnazarov, 1993, p. 145). He preferred making speeches to dealing with policy implementation. At the end of 1990, instead of dealing with the crisis, Gorbachev 'gave disproportionate attention to preparing and editing his speeches. There were more than enough of them, which simply weakened further his position' (Chernyaev, 1993, p. 397).

Unlike his predecessors and the rulers of many other socialist¹⁸ countries (e.g. Deng), Gorbachev was unwilling to use force to suppress discontent and maintain the USSR.¹⁹ It has been argued that if Gorbachev had been prepared to use force to nip the various nationalist and anti-communist movements in the bud, 'the Soviet Union would still exist' (Shakhnazarov, 1993, p. 133).

Gorbachev did not have a taste for economic issues, and often skipped over the substance of important decisions, preferring to focus on foreign affairs (Boldin, 1994, p. 144; Pavlov, 1995, p. 52). In 1989–91, as the internal situation became more and more difficult and his domestic popularity steadily fell, Gorbachev increasingly turned to the West. 'Gorbachev felt greatly flattered by his admission to the club of world leaders' (Boldin, 1994, p. 131); '...he was intoxicated by the possibility of becoming one of the major world leaders' (Ryzhkov, 1995, p. 543).

Surprises in the conduct of perestroika

Continuity and surprise

While pre-1985 concerns centered on economic and military issues, the most radical policies of the new ruler came first in the areas of ideology and political reform. In the military and economic field, the original policies were scrapped before they had a chance to bear fruit, and were superseded by radical and untried initiatives.

The demolition of ideology

Ideology has long been considered by Western scholars as a post-factum rationalisation for pragmatic policies, not a guide to action or something rulers actually believed.

Yet the memoirs show that in the 1970s and 1980s ideology still played an important role in the Soviet system.

Gorbachev and his wife, who had a say on policy, are both described as earnest Marxist-Leninists (Boldin, 1994, pp. 85–86, 95–97). Gorbachev's initial attitude to the advice on economic reform was shaped by the ideological 'dogmas' (Boldin, 1994, p. 50). Foreign policies such as the Afghanistan invasion, support for foreign communist parties and 'progressive' Third World regimes were significantly influenced by the ideology (Kornienko, 1995, p. 196; Grachev, 1994b, pp. 55–64).²⁰ Official ideology also limited the choice of economic policies, not just through political censorship but through the notions internalised by most people, radical reformers included (*Istoricheskie...*, 1995, pp. 19, 119).

It has been argued that changes in foreign policy (withdrawal from Afghanistan, ending the support for expensive and unattractive foreign allies and improvement in relations with NATO countries) required, in addition to summit meetings and international treaties, a change of ideology (Chernyaev, 1993, p. 191). Yet the same purpose could arguably have been achieved by bending and modifying the existing ideology, as had been done repeatedly in the history of the USSR.²¹ Instead, a veritable war on the official ideology was started, apparently before most of the radical policies were decided.

The views of the CC propaganda department head A.N. Yakovlev (1992) help explain why. By the late 1980s he saw the USSR as an illegitimate political formation, based on utopian and erroneous ideas and with a past that was a scandal.²² The root of the Soviet Union's economic lag was in the attempt to implement an erroneous doctrine—Marxism. Hence the development of the USSR required not just new policies and institutions but also the removal of Marxism as the official doctrine of the USSR and recognition of its harmful consequences.

The main directions of ideological assault were the criticism of the contemporary 'bureaucrats' (on which more below) and the re-examination of Soviet history, starting especially with Stalin's rule. During the Brezhnev period the discussion of Stalinism was swept under the carpet. In the early *perestroika* period the most radical publications on Soviet history were approved, edited or (re)written in Yakovlev's section of the CC apparatus before they were published. 'This happened with the articles unmasking the Stalinist repressions, and then about the Leninist period...' (Grachev, 1994b, pp. 109–110).

The first conflicts of principle in the Politburo within the group of Andropov and Gorbachev promotees occurred around history. In February 1988, in his report to a CC Plenum, Ligachev rejected what he regarded as attempts to paint Soviet history a solid black. These remarks had been preceded by a skirmish between Ligachev and Yakovlev about them at the politburo meeting where the report was approved (Ligachev, 1992, p. 125). Prior to the Plenum, Ligachev (1987) made a speech in the town of Elektrostal' in August 1987 at which he made some remarks about Soviet history. These gave rise to a critical reaction by Gorbachev (Ligachev, 1992, pp. 119–124).

In September 1987 the Politburo set up a commission to investigate the Stalinist repressions. The material it uncovered probably contributed both to radicalising (some of) the members of the commission and also to politically weakening the opponents

of Gorbachev's policies. Thus, Vorotnikov was 'shaken' by the archival documents on repressions which Gorbachev read to him in August 1987: '...although I was a member of the Politburo, I was not even familiar with the complete materials of the XX congress of the CPSU' (Vorotnikov, 1995, pp. 152–153). Anti-Stalinism became an important part of Soviet/Russian political language and political motivation in 1987–92. In April 1988, when explaining to senior party officials the huge emphasis he placed on criticising the Nina Andreeva letter, Gorbachev argued that Nina Andreeva, 'if we accept her logic, is summoning us to a new 1937' (Chernyaev, 1993, p. 212).²³

Political reform

Economic reform was a pragmatic undertaking with a well-established pedigree in the post-Stalin USSR, as well as elsewhere in the socialist countries. Political overhaul, with popular elections and the party's withdrawal from economic management, was unprecedented.²⁴

Gorbachev explains political reform by the need to break bureaucratic opposition to his economic reforms. The resistance of the ministries and local party committees supposedly doomed the economic reforms of 1965 (Gorbachev, 1995b, pp. 117–120). Gorbachev's trips around the country in July–August 1986 left him with the impression that his radical initiatives were being undermined by the lack of enthusiasm for them of local officials (Gorbachev, 1995b, pp. 305–306). Although he rejected the idea suggested to him of adopting the Chinese Cultural Revolution slogan 'bombard headquarters', the campaign in the media attacking 'bureaucrats' and 'forces of deceleration' was unleashed. The *nomenklatura* system of appointing officials was attacked at the January (1987) CC Plenum. Gorbachev sought to politicise society so as to mobilise socio-political support and make his reforms irreversible (Gorbachev, 1995b, p. 281).²⁵

Gorbachev's claim of resistance to his policies is echoed by his supporters in the Politburo. 'The country was cynically led to financial and economic collapse in the calculation that escape from the crisis would require those same structures of state exploitation and arbitrariness which *perestroika* had attempted to leave behind' (Yakovlev, 1992, p. 177).²⁶ However, these charges have never been detailed and substantiated. Sometimes they are stated in a form that lacks credibility (e.g. 'sectoral interests could "eat up" anyone, including the chairman of the Council of Ministers and even the General Secretary' (*Istoricheskie...*, p. 123). The difficulties in the implementation of *perestroika* might have been due to its undefined nature, or to the lack of interest in following up the decisions once taken (Boldin, 1994, pp. 117, 125, 147; Korobeinikov, 1996, pp. 84–85). As Medvedev pointed out at a meeting of the Politburo on 22 January 1990, 'things are going badly today not because of our inheritance but because of mistakes and inadequate actions during *perestroika* itself' (Chernyaev, 1993, p. 328). It should also be noted that efforts to combat the alleged resistance to the 1987 reform started well in advance of the reform itself.

Gorbachev's 'Khrushchev syndrome' (Ligachev, 1992, p. 104) is a more plausible motive for political change. It was partly to avoid Khrushchev's fate, of removal from office by a majority in the Politburo, that Gorbachev became President in 1990 and

at the XXVIII Congress (July 1990) arranged that the General Secretary should be chosen by the Congress and not by the Central Committee.

The implementation of the economic reform announced in June 1987 was combined with the beginning of political reform formally agreed at the 19th Party Conference in June 1988: '...on top of the complicated programme of rebuilding the economy discussed at the Politburo on 23 and 30 April [1987], was placed the even more complicated task of rebuilding the political-party and state system. This knocked the country from its rhythm' (Vorotnikov, 1995, p. 146).

Military and foreign policy

When recommending Gorbachev for the post of General Secretary at the CC meeting of 11 March 1995, Gromyko stated that, for Gorbachev, 'defence and vigilance²⁷ are a sacred matter. In current circumstances this is the holy of holies' (Chernyaev, 1993, p. 30).²⁸ For a while, the military was treated in accordance with Gromyko's expectations. In the 1986–90 five-year plan military expenditure was to grow faster than the NMP, which itself was envisioned to accelerate significantly (Ryzhkov, 1989). This would have been a sharp reversal of the slow-down in the growth of military spending in the late 1970s and early 1980s estimated by the CIA.²⁹ Similarly, according to Kryuchkov (1996a, p. 223), Gorbachev initially tried to end the Afghanistan war by military means. In September 1985 he reacted firmly to the British expulsion of 31 Soviet officials for spying (by expelling 31 British officials) whereas in March 1983 Andropov had not retaliated for the French expulsion of 47 Soviet officials (Kryuchkov, 1996a, pp. 113–116).

Yet in the middle of his reign Gorbachev changed course. In his report to the 19th Party Conference of 28 June 1988 Gorbachev referred to the Soviet failure to use political methods to improve the security of the USSR. 'As a result we let ourselves be drawn into the arms race, which was bound to affect the socio-economic development of the country and its international position'. The policy of curbing the arms race and reducing military expenditure seems to have been launched at a Politburo meeting of 3 November 1988 (Chernyaev, 1993, pp. 255–256).

Finding out what accounted for this reversal is not easy. While the Politburo under Gorbachev discussed a very wide range of issues, 'only military issues were not discussed in detail; for these there was a special restricted body, the Supreme Military Council, again headed by Gorbachev. Because of this, not all Politburo members were aware of what was going on in the military field' (Dobrynin, 1995, p. 618).³⁰ The ex-General Secretary does not tell us either. Discussing the Soviet response to SDI, Gorbachev writes that 'government officials must not reveal everything that they learned as a result of their position. Even today I must not initiate the reader into certain details' (Gorbachev, 1995c, p. 16). The published explanations of the change in foreign and military policy should be interpreted with this statement in mind.

The cost of the cold war is commonly cited as the reason for the change in policy (Akhromeev & Kornienko, 1992, p. 55; Ryzhkov, 1992, pp. 232–233; Shevardnadze, 1991, pp. 110–111). Yet all such references are too general. They do not explain why a decision to cut military expenditure followed on the heels of a decision to accelerate

its growth, and what specific factors made the rulers consider the costs of the old policy prohibitive.³¹

A key role in the military policy reversal has been assigned to the Rust affair (the flight in May 1987 of a young German over Soviet territory to Red Square without being intercepted by the Soviet armed forces) (Boldin, 1994, pp. 166–167).³² But was this a cause or a pretext? According to the former Minister of Defence, Yazov, the Rust affair was just a pretext for Gorbachev to rid himself of the then Minister of Defence, Sokolov, a vocal opponent of the position being taken by the USSR in the disarmament negotiations (Prokhanov, 1995).³³ The seeds of the policy reversal, according to this interpretation, thus predated Rust's flight.

The emergence of the republics

Gorbachev inherited a *de facto* unitary state and was removed from power by insurgent republics. What explains this strange metamorphosis?

An important contribution to the emergence of the republics as independent political actors was made by the change in personnel policy, the transition from the *nomenklatura* system to genuine elections. In the traditional Soviet model, officials throughout the country were selected by the corresponding party committee and their stay in office depended on the opinion of them held by that committee. For senior positions throughout the country, the relevant party committee was the CC in Moscow (in practice its secretariat or Politburo or the General Secretary himself). As Gorbachev (1995b, p. 123) has observed about the former system, 'every [regional first secretary] knew very well that he would be removed from his office and from power if the attitudes to him of the Politburo, Secretariat and General Secretary changed, in particular if he should lose the confidence of the General Secretary'. From 1987 onwards this system was denounced by the party leaders, who no longer defended local officials from attacks in their areas. Hence, to retain their offices, local officials had to seek local support. This required them to pay attention to local attitudes and oppose local interests to those of the centre. As Pavlov has explained (1993, p. 23),

abandoned by the centre, the republican and local leaders at first as an enforced measure and then more and more consciously, began to seek a local power base. Isolationism, separatism and nationalism³⁴ were used by the majority of them as the only means of saving themselves and their power, and then turned into independent goals—to separate, rise up and promote the self-development of a part at the expense of the collapse and destruction of the whole. This path, with varying speeds and results, was trodden by all the national-territorial units. Having begun with questions of the national language, the national culture, rehabilitation and calls for repentance, compensation, they could not stop at this, but followed this path to the end, till full separation. Only a firm hand and force could stop the process of the development of militant nationalism. But Gorbachev did not want to use this.³⁵

A significant development was the democratic elections in 1990 at republican level. These led to the emergence of anti-communist republican leaderships which first of all attacked the USSR government headed by Ryzhkov and subsequently destroyed the USSR headed by Gorbachev. These elections were a part of Gorbachev's political reform programme. The emergence of the republics as major political players in response to *perestroika* made the formulation and implementation of macroeconomic

policy more difficult. Pavlov (1993, pp. 75–91) has described how the attempt by the Union government in the summer of 1991 to stabilise the economic situation and introduce economic reforms was thwarted by the republics and by Gorbachev agreeing to their exorbitant demands. Gorbachev's policy of organising republican elections was based on the illusion that democracy would lead to support for his programme. In fact it led to the emergence of separatist movements (in the Baltic, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) and to the use of the RSFSR by the 'democrats' to destroy socialism and the USSR.

Gorbachev's foreign policy also had a destabilising influence on the situation in the Baltic states. His policy of ending the cold war, and close cooperation with the West, made him open to pressure from the West to recognise the rights of the Baltic republics, especially Lithuania, to self-determination. Such pressure was exerted, for example, by Bush during the May–June 1990 Washington summit (Gorbachev, 1995c, pp. 183–186). On the other hand, partly because of Gorbachev's policies, the West opposed the striving for independence of the major actors in the break-up process, Russia and Ukraine. Kozyrev (1995, pp. 155–157) has described the hostility to El'tsin and Russian aspirations in the USA as late as January–February 1991. Similarly, Zamyatin (1995, p. 77) has described how Thatcher had earlier told the Soviet ambassador about her 'faith in Gorbachev' and characterised the wish of the republics for full independence as 'politically mistaken'.³⁶

Was it done on purpose?

Unintended consequences

In 1984 Yakovlev, who was already working with him on some documents, stated that Gorbachev was a 'reformer with a capital R'. 'If he becomes General Secretary, colossal changes will take place in the country...' (Kalugin, 1995, p. 288). During a visit to the Netherlands in 1995 Gorbachev is reported to have said that already when he was working in Stavropol he realised that it would be necessary to reach the top of the party hierarchy in order to change the system.³⁷ Even if this is true, 'to change the system' may well have had a different significance in Stavropol in the late 1970s than it has today.³⁸

Just how radical was the 'reformer with a capital R'? In April 1985 *perestroika*, in his [Gorbachev's] understanding, did not affect the "fundamentals" [of the Soviet system]' (Chernyaev, 1993, pp. 39, 43–44).³⁹ There are repeated references that through 1988 Gorbachev wanted to improve the society he had inherited, not replace it by something different.⁴⁰ Yet both in 1986 and in 1989 'nobody knew in concrete terms what needed to be done' (Boldin, 1994, p. 117). Gorbachev's intention was to 'modernise' the CPSU, transforming it into a party 'guaranteeing democracy, civil liberties, and a high level and quality of life' (Gorbachev, 1995b, pp. 413, 427). According to a close aide, it was only in 1990 that Gorbachev abandoned socialism (Chernyaev, 1993, pp. 294, 473).

Gorbachev '...was slow to understand market relations. In 1984–85, the meaning of "the market" escaped him altogether; he feared and avoided any mention of it. Lengthy discussions were needed in order to explain to him [the notion of the

market]' (Boldin, 1994, p. 23). 'In the beginning he did not want even to hear about private property, thinking that it would be possible to create a market economy with freely competitive state enterprises and co-operatives'.⁴¹ In his own words, '...we really hoped to overcome stagnation by using the "advantages of socialism", such as plan-mobilisation methods, organisational work, the consciousness and activity of the working people' (Gorbachev, 1995b, p. 336). In 1985 acceleration of technical progress and modernisation of the engineering sector were regarded as the most urgent economic tasks, and radical economic reform as a matter for the early 1990s (Gorbachev, 1995b, p. 337).

Nor did Gorbachev intend to break up the USSR. In February 1988, when there were mass demonstrations in Erevan in support of unification with Nagorno-Karabakh, Gorbachev was 'indignant' (Grachev, 1994b, p. 122). The freedom which he had granted in order to acquire new allies in his struggle with officialdom was being used for entirely different purposes. 'Did he have a strategic plan for the liquidation of the party and the destruction of the country? I think that there was not such a plan...Attempting to change society, he unintentionally destroyed [our] statehood' (Boldin, 1995, p. 336).⁴² Similarly, the editor of *Pravda* in 1976–89 suggests that the collapse of the USSR was not a conscious aim of Gorbachev but the unintended result of a well meaning policy aimed at improving conditions in the USSR (Afanaseev, 1994, p. 95).

Gorbachev's views on Soviet foreign policy also changed over time. In 1985 he did not have a full picture of the situation in Eastern Europe, let alone a programme for changing things there (Gorbachev, 1995c, chapter 1 and pp. 313–314). 'Gorbachev never foresaw that the whole of Eastern Europe would fly out of the Soviet orbit within months or that the Warsaw Pact would crumble so soon. He became the helpless witness to the consequences of his own policy' (Dobrynin, 1995, p. 632).

The conclusion that the destruction of the Soviet system was an unintended result of the attempts to improve it also emerges from the memoirs of Gorbachev's speechwriter in his Stavropol period (Korobeinikov, 1996, pp. 104, 168, 196), the memoirs of Politburo members Shevardnadze, Ryzhkov, Medvedev and Ligachev, as well as those of Dobrynin and Boldin. These are people with opposing attitudes to Gorbachev and quite different positions in post-Soviet politics.⁴³

Capitalist-roaders in the leadership

A. N. Yakovlev, '...while serving as ambassador in Canada,...had worked out a whole programme of changes applicable to key sectors in the Soviet Union'⁴⁴ (Boldin, 1995, p. 73). When Gorbachev visited Canada in 1983 at the initiative of Yakovlev, the latter 'explained his view of the development of the USSR and the world, explained the ways which could lead to the improvement of our society' (Boldin, 1995, p. 49). 'The notion of *perestroika*, together with all its basic components, was mainly the work of Yakovlev. Practically all Gorbachev's speeches were also based on Yakovlev's thinking' (Boldin, 1994, p. 113).⁴⁵ This thinking initially concerned reforming the USSR, though in a radical fashion. At the end of 1985 Yakovlev sent Gorbachev a letter advocating breaking the CPSU into two competing parties (Yakovlev, 1992, pp. 127–128).⁴⁶

Yet even Yakovlev could not foresee and did not originally intend what was to happen only a few years later. According to his own account, it was only during 1987 that

Yakovlev concluded that reforms were impossible and that it was necessary to dismantle the inherited system (Yakovlev, 1992, p. 266). 'As soon as *perestroika* began, everything cracked: the economy, ideology, the state and social structures. ...it is time to recognise that the building was rotten internally in all its most important parts. To reconstruct them was in fact impossible. It was necessary to build on new foundations' (Yakovlev, 1992, p. 133).⁴⁷ In January 1990 Yakovlev advised Gorbachev to accelerate economic transformation (Chernyaev, 1993, pp. 330–332). The fact that an individual with this perspective was one of the top officials and a close adviser of the General Secretary partly explains what otherwise might seem the puzzling reaction of the leaders to the rapid deterioration of the situation in the country under their stewardship.

The unravelling of the Soviet system generated a 'bandwagon effect' among the previously loyal officials. G. Arbatov, in 1985–88 a communist supporting reforms within the party, by 1989–90 was a member of the Congress of People's Deputies engaged in political struggle against the conservative wing of the party, and by 1991 was convinced 'that the CPSU had become a force irrevocably hostile to the public interest' (Arbatov, 1992, pp. 346–351). Without the significant number of people willing to push the system after it started tottering, it might not have fallen.

While Gorbachev's radical advisers were deliberately targeting some elements of the Soviet system, they were not aiming at the country's break-up. Shakhnazarov, a self-described social democrat since the 1960s, regrets the dissolution of the Union (Shakhnazarov, 1993, pp. 240–242).

On the other hand, some high officials in the Gorbachev administration (such as V. V. Bakatin, Minister of Internal Affairs in 1988–90) were prepared to accept both the end of socialism and of the Union. On 25 February 1990 there was a major demonstration in the centre of Moscow by the 'democratic' (i.e. anti-communist) opposition. At the Politburo meeting afterwards, Bakatin argued that the widespread popular dissatisfaction which the demonstration symbolised should be dealt with by political means, e.g. a 'round table' (Chernyaev, 1993, p. 335).⁴⁸ Bearing in mind the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe, this was tantamount to a call for a peaceful transfer of power to the opposition.⁴⁹

In May 1990 Bakatin sent a letter to Gorbachev advocating the reintroduction of capitalism and the transformation of the USSR into a union of republics akin to the EU or subsequent CIS.⁵⁰ Both socialism and the *de facto* unitary Soviet state were things to be opposed rather than valued inheritances which had to be preserved. Bakatin did not confine himself to words, transferring to the Union Republics a large part of the personnel and equipment of the MVD in 1989–90 (Pavlov, 1993, p. 31; Kryuchkov, 1996a, p. 437). This strengthened the Republics, making wars between them (e.g. Azerbaijan and Armenia) possible, and weakening the centre. By 1989–90 the head of the Soviet police, riot police and internal troops had become a representative of the 'democratic' opposition.

The opposition

The original idea of the 'democrats', which they subscribed to in the summer of 1989, was to form an opposition at the all-Union level, modelled on parliamentary oppositions in Western countries (Popov, 1994, p. 67). They expected that the party

would remain in power for some years. In the winter of 1989–90 they changed their tactics and strove for power at the republican and municipal levels.

Was this decision right? Today I am not so sure. We did not take full account, firstly of the fact that elections in the republics would inevitably strengthen the forces of national liberation or push the communist-nationalists themselves—in the search for votes—to put forward the slogans of national rebirth. Also in Russia this aspect—the stress on the rebirth of Russia—began to play an important role. ...We chose that path in the struggle for power which contained within itself the possibility of ending the USSR. (Popov, 1994, p. 78)

The possibility that after the defeat of the August putsch El'tsin might have replaced Gorbachev as leader of the Union, and hence prevented the dissolution of the USSR into 15 independent states, has been considered by Popov (1994, p. 269) and by El'tsin himself (1994, pp. 154–155). El'tsin writes that this was impossible for him because 'psychologically I couldn't occupy the place of Gorbachev'. In other words, as a result of his personal and political struggle with Gorbachev, he felt Gorbachev's throne too tarnished to be worth occupying and determined to occupy a different one.

Why did they not turn back?

Impotent opponents of perestroika

The preceding section dealt with actors who, in various degrees, did not anticipate the consequences of *perestroika* but, when faced with these consequences, were ready to accept them and even go further. But many of the senior party and government officials were profoundly alarmed by many of the developments of the *perestroika* period and wanted them reversed.

Ligachev has noted that 'approximately from the second half of 1987 my differences with some members of the top political leadership gradually began to stand out' (Ligachev, 1992, p. 71). These differences came to a head in March 1988 with the publication of Nina Andreeva's letter in *Sovetskaya Rossiya* (13 March). This gave rise to a very unusual two-day long meeting of the Politburo (24 and 25 March). Although some members of the Politburo and CC Secretaries were quite positive about the letter (Ligachev, 1992, p. 130), Yakovlev and Gorbachev used it to score a stunning political victory. This enabled them to go ahead with the dramatic political reforms of 1988–89, which met remarkably little resistance in the leadership. Although Gromyko by 1988 apparently was critical of *perestroika* and regretted his support for Gorbachev in 1985 (Kryuchkov, 1996a, p. 253), it was too late for him to do anything about it.

Turning back did have some support in the Politburo, but not enough. In the stormy Politburo discussion of 29 January 1990 on the economic situation and the policies for overcoming the difficulties, Kryuchkov, head of the KGB, suggested that 'perhaps we should even retreat from something [i.e. from one or more of the innovations of the *perestroika* period]', a suggestion which found little support (Chernyaev, 1993, p. 332).⁵¹ Turning back, not just as a remark in a discussion but in a premeditated political document, was advocated by Ligachev in March 1990. In a letter to Gorbachev he argued that 'the party and the Fatherland are in danger, I would say in extraordinary danger' (Ligachev, 1992, pp. 96–99). He requested a meeting of the CC

to discuss the situation. He urged that the party be purged of revisionists, social-democrats and nationalists. Despite this letter, which was circulated to Politburo members, Gorbachev went ahead with his plans to turn the USSR into a presidential state and to change the ideology of the CPSU in a social-democratic direction.⁵²

Vorotnikov poses the question of why he and other Politburo members who fully supported Ligachev's position did not insist on a CC Plenum to discuss the state of the party and country, as Ligachev had requested (Vorotnikov, 1995, p. 365). He gives as the main reason that 'we all still believed in the General Secretary, relied on his ability to find solutions, a way out of the situation which had developed'. Elsewhere, he notes that potential opponents of Gorbachev in the Politburo spent much of their energy fighting each other, and were far from forming a united front (Vorotnikov, 1996).

In 1988–91 many assemblies of party officials opposed Gorbachev's policy, yet voted unanimously for his proposals (Medvedev, 1994, pp. 76–77, 93–94, 96–97). At the all-Union level he does not seem to have been voted down in an open party forum on any issue.⁵³ In the words of Yakovlev, the totalitarian party, with its organisation, discipline and obedience, was used to overthrow the totalitarian regime (Vladina, 1994). Indeed, according to Yakovlev (1994, p. 258), the reason why Gorbachev rejected Yakovlev's 1985 advice to split the party was because Gorbachev considered that under Soviet conditions only a totalitarian party could get the better of the totalitarian system. The role of party discipline in fatally weakening inner-party opposition to Gorbachev has also been pointed out by former defence minister Yazov (Prokhanov, 1995), former first deputy chairman of the KGB Bobkov (1995, p. 368), and former deputy prime minister Shcherbakov (1995).

By the time senior party officials started to get over their habit of obedience, the consequences of political reform made any political action on their part much more difficult. In the summer of 1990, during the XXVIII congress, Gorbachev met regional party bosses. The meeting became unruly as the first secretaries expressed their opposition to the party line. The bosses' obedience was restored when Gorbachev's aide threatened to expose their opposition in a speech at the congress. Implicit in this threat was a warning that he might call on the people to attack the party bosses (Shatalin, 1992). The final stand of the defenders of (at least some elements of) the old regime was the August 1991 coup. Whilst the plotters were successful in gaining the support of the Union government, they tripped up over the opposition of the newly elected President, Government and Supreme Soviet of Russia. This demonstrated the effectiveness of Gorbachev's political reforms in making detotalitarianisation irreversible.

Turning back as a way to overcome the economic crisis

In early 1990 the first deputy chairman of Gosplan, L. Vid, prepared an alarming report about the deterioration of the economy. In response, the heads of the State Commission for economic reform and Gosplan, Abalkin and Maslyukov, elaborated two variants for overcoming the crisis. One envisioned reviving the administrative system and dealing with the crisis by traditional Soviet methods. The other required

rapid progress towards a market economy. On 17 February 1990 an outline of both variants, with a covering letter clearly expressing a preference for the second variant, was submitted to Ryzhkov. The Council of Ministers accepted this standpoint and issued a decree aimed to 'accelerate the transition to a planned-market economy' (Abalkin, 1991, pp. 120–123).

There seem to be four reasons why the Maslyukov–Abalkin group preferred the second path. First, fear that embarking on the first path would inevitably return the country to the days of mass terror.⁵⁴ The attack on ideology was yielding fruit. Second, the view that the first variant 'would hardly be supported by the Supreme Soviet and social movements'.⁵⁵ The political changes introduced by Gorbachev had made the adoption of the first variant very difficult. Third, the view that even if the first variant were officially adopted, 'its implementation is improbable, even if force is used for this purpose'.⁵⁶ This too was a result of Gorbachev's political reforms. Fourth, it fitted in with the decisions of the February 1990 Plenum of the CC, which had adopted a platform with the title 'Towards a humane, democratic socialism'. The Council of Ministers could scarcely ignore this fundamental political decision and return to the traditional model.

Braking the democratisation process in the interests of economic stability was repeatedly discussed from March 1990 by the economic ministers who saw that the country was heading for a disaster (Pavlov, 1995, pp. 27–28). They were particularly concerned by the media attacks on the Council of Ministers, which undermined its authority, making it increasingly difficult to control the situation. They more than once urged Ryzhkov to threaten to resign, together with the whole of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers, if 'the propaganda war orchestrated by the CC' continued. Ryzhkov declined to accept this advice till December 1990.

At the end of July 1990 the leaders of the USSR and of Russia commissioned a group headed by Academician Shatalin to prepare a programme for the transition to the market. The resulting document, written in August, was the well known '500 days' programme. After discussion of this document and of the rival government programme at an expanded joint meeting of the Presidential Council and the Council of the Federation on 30–31 August, and shortly afterwards at a smaller, more business-like meeting with the authors of the programme and some others, and having received analyses of the two programmes from some academic institutes and his own staff, Gorbachev decided not to commit himself to the 500 days programme. He considered that, although the programme was superior from a purely economic point of view, it jeopardised the continued existence of the USSR as a state by ignoring the need for federal taxes and undermining the role of the Union government (Gorbachev, 1995b, pp. 571–578). Hence on 4 September he asked Academician Aganbegyan to merge the two programmes.

Aganbegyan's committee examined 13 documents and divided them into three groups: 'command-administrative' programmes, those characterised by 'market extremism', and those aimed at a 'regulated market economy'. Aganbegyan chose this last approach as being the best.⁵⁷

Hence it can be seen that the option of turning back as a method of overcoming the economic crisis was considered several times during 1990, and each time was rejected for what seemed at the time weighty reasons. When, in September 1990,

Gorbachev rejected rushing ahead, he did not suggest turning back but simply going ahead more cautiously.

Conclusion

The abundant memoir literature is an important source of information about the collapse of the Soviet system. It throws light on such things as the economic advice given to the leadership, its perception of the international situation, Gorbachev's leadership style, the reasons for the attack on Marxism-Leninism and for political reform in general, the role of the capitalist-readers in the leadership, and the reasons why the leadership did not turn back despite the rapid deterioration of the situation. As far as the overall interpretation of the collapse is concerned, on the whole (with some exceptions) the memoir literature corroborates the 'unintended consequences' interpretation.

*University of Amsterdam,
Haverford College*

¹ A number of papers based on interviews have already appeared. See for example Lane (1996), White *et al.* (1996).

² Examples of destruction of primary records are that on 27 August 1991 Gorbachev's wife burned their old letters (Grachev, 1994a, pp. 223–224) and in the winter of 1991–1992 Gorbachev destroyed some of his notebooks (Gorbachev, 1995b, p. 275).

³ Ligachev also substantially qualifies El'tsin's account of the choice of Gorbachev as party leader (Ligachev, 1992, pp. 28–29 and 57–67).

⁴ The minutes of the meeting (*Istochnik*, 1993,0) confirm this. The minutes also suggest how this confusion may have arisen. They appear to conflate the two meetings and record them as if they were one. (This illustrates one of the weaknesses of reliance on archives as a method of historical research—the events recorded in the archives may never have taken place as recorded. It also emphasises the value of combining memoirs and contemporary official minutes in an integrated account of what took place.) For a popular, and very verbose, discussion by a former insider of the limitations of archival research for understanding Soviet history, see Pechenev (1996, pp. 3–22).

⁵ This applies, for example, to the Politburo meetings of 4 December 1986, 29 January 1990 and 2 March 1990. For details see below.

⁶ The version of the memoirs of former KGB general Kalugin which has appeared in the West is explicitly stated to have been 'adapted to the tastes of local readers' (Kalugin, 1995, p. 6).

⁷ N. K. Baibakov, the chairman of Gosplan, wrote a Note of Dissent to the Kirillin report of December 1979 (Latsis, 1993).

⁸ This belies the widespread view that 15 years at the helm of the KGB made Andropov extremely well informed about the country's problems (e.g. Ryzhkov, 1992, p. 43). According to Kryuchkov (1996a, p. 42), Andropov regarded himself as an ignoramus on economic matters.

⁹ Gorbachev started his own teach-ins with top government and academic economists even earlier (Boldin, 1994, pp. 36–37).

¹⁰ That Soviet military thinkers were 'paranoid' about SDI is confirmed by Sagdeev (1994, p. 307).

¹¹ One source sets military expenditure at 34–36% of NMP, while another gives it as 8% of the GDP or 11% of the NMP in 1984. Yet another argues that the real level of military expenditure in the Brezhnev period is unknown (Pavlov, 1993, p. 15; Akhromeev & Kornienko, 1992, p. 17; Yakovlev, 1994, pp. 195, 288).

¹² Maslyukov (1995), currently one of the leaders of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, argues that 'the country needed reforms'. He also states that it had been desirable to end the cold war and political repression. See also Ryzhkov (1994; 1995, pp. 80, 540), Afanasev (1994, p. 65) or Kryuchkov (1996a, pp. 273, 286).

¹³ In 1985 'the "elite" could and was determined to rule further, and the "masses", with the exception of a comparatively small group of the intelligentsia, did not dream of a change of system, which became very clear during subsequent events' (Shakhnazarov, 1993, p. 11).

¹⁴ This has been corroborated by a number of people who were close to him (Gorbachev, 1995b, chapter 8; Kalugin, 1995, pp. 248–250; Katushev, 1993, p. 148; Shakhnazarov, 1993, p. 34; Grishin, 1994; Kalgin, 1994; Grishin, 1996, p. 61).

¹⁵ This opinion is shared by Chazov (1992, p. 173) and Kryuchkov (1996b, p. 293). Other memoirists stress that Andropov would never have endangered the role of the party in society. One source maintains that Andropov did aim at significant democratisation and pluralisation of Soviet political and cultural life, but only about 15–20 years in the future, by which time he hoped that Soviet economic problems would have been overcome by successful economic reform (Grachev, 1994b, pp. 84–85).

¹⁶ Kunaev (1992, p. 239) paints a positive picture of both Andropov as General Secretary and of Shelepin. He criticises Shelepin's transfer from the Politburo and Council of Ministers to minor posts and subsequent retirement. He repeats his positive evaluation of Shelepin in Kunaev (1994, p. 257).

¹⁷ Akhromeev & Kornienko, 1992, p. 306; Boldin, 1994, p. 112 and Boldin, 1995, p. 152; Dobrynin, 1995, p. 637; and Shakhnazarov, 1993, p. 13.

¹⁸ The word 'socialist' is used in this article in the Soviet sense.

¹⁹ Shakhnazarov, 1993, p. 18. See also Kozyrev, 1995, p. 161.

²⁰ Apparently, Gorbachev's Foreign Affairs Minister Shevardnadze considered cancelling Thatcher's visit to Moscow because of her speech attacking socialism (Zamyatin, 1995, p. 46).

²¹ See Gerschenkron (1971, pp. 287) on the flexibility of ideology.

²² This had not always been his position. In the late 1960s he seems to have been an adherent of the Shelepin faction (Aleksandrov-Agentov, 1994, p. 256).

²³ '1937' in the USSR referred to the Stalinist mass terror.

²⁴ The decision to proceed with economic and political reforms simultaneously is commonly seen as Gorbachev's main mistake by his opponents (Akhromeev & Kornienko, 1992, pp. 313–314; Kunaev, 1992, p. 295).

²⁵ In May 1989 Gorbachev told Zhao Ziyang that Soviet experience showed that without political reform economic reform was impossible, since the old political forces would derail it (Gorbachev, 1995c, pp. 443–444). He said the same to Li Peng in April 1990 (Gorbachev, 1995c, p. 452).

²⁶ Repeated in Yakovlev, 1994, p. 253. See also Vorotnikov, 1996, and Medvedev in *Istoricheskie...*, p. 125.

²⁷ In the USSR, the word 'vigilance' always referred to the activities of the KGB.

²⁸ In November 1985 Gorbachev himself described strengthening defence as 'the holy of holies' (Vorotnikov, 1995, p. 79).

²⁹ See Kurtzweg, 1987, p. 151.

³⁰ In the Brezhnev period, apart from the General Secretary himself and the Minister of Defence, only two members of the Politburo were also members of the Supreme Defence Council, the Foreign Minister (Gromyko) and the head of the KGB (Andropov). (The Supreme Defence Council and the Supreme Military Council seem to be the same body.) (Dobrynin, 1995, p. 234).

³¹ A former CC official attaches great importance to the Afghan factor in destabilising the Soviet system (Grachev, 1994b, pp. 66–67).

³² Chernyaev confirms that Gorbachev took the Rust affair very seriously (Chernyaev, 1993, pp. 156–161).

³³ This is supported by Dobrynin, 1995, pp. 624–626.

³⁴ In the USSR, the word 'nationalism' had very negative associations. (The corresponding 'positive' word was 'patriotism'.)

³⁵ Although it is more in the nature of theorising than direct observation, it is interesting to note that two former senior Soviet officials—Akhromeev & Kornienko (1992, p. 313)—argued that the rewriting of article 6 (this was the article which legalised the one-party system) of the USSR constitution in 1990 deprived the centre of a very important means of control over the republics. This led to conflicts between the republics and the centre and the republics themselves which had serious adverse economic consequences. Akhromeev & Kornienko argue that these conflicts were not mainly a result of problems inherited from the past: 'the chief reason for what took place was the mistakes of the leadership in the period since 1985'.

³⁶ The memoirs of some Western diplomats and politicians active in 1985–91 have been published and these can be checked against the Soviet memoirs to get a fuller picture.

³⁷ *Pravda*, 7 June 1995. In his memoirs he writes that in the 1970s 'I understood that to initiate changes in our country was only possible from above. To a considerable extent this determined my attitude to the proposal to transfer [from Stavropol] to work in the CC of the CPSU' (Gorbachev, 1995b, p. 170).

³⁸ Gorbachev states that from the very beginning of his rule he aimed to subject his absolute power to democratic control (Gorbachev, 1995c, p. 626). This self-congratulatory remark lacks independent confirmation.

³⁹ Chernyaev is characterised as Gorbachev's 'faithful and most reliable' assistant, his '*alter ego*' (Grachev, 1994a, p. 241).

⁴⁰ Chernyaev, 1993, p. 71; Gorbachev, 1995b, pp. 293, 379–380; Shakhnazarov, 1993, p. 13.

⁴¹ Shakhnazarov, 1993, p. 191; confirmed by Petrakov, 1995.

⁴² The last part of this quotation, which explicitly draws attention to the unintended nature of the collapse of the USSR, is not in the English edition (Boldin, 1994, p. 238). Further on in the Russian edition Boldin partially qualifies his support for the 'unintended consequences' interpretation. He writes; 'Speaking about the mistakes of the General Secretary, his hasty steps and insufficiently thought out decisions, I start out from the position that the mistakes made by Gorbachev were a result of his character, of his sympathy or antipathy for one or another party, economic or state leader. But I cannot guarantee that they were not planned actions, consciously designed to undermine the party and state' (Boldin, 1995, p. 423). These sentences too are not in the English edition (Boldin, 1994, pp. 286–287).

⁴³ Two groups argue that the Soviet collapse was deliberately engineered. One, including former top officers of the KGB, maintains that the CIA used its 'agents of influence' in the Soviet leadership to destroy the Soviet system (Kryuchkov in Prokhanov, 1995 and in Kryuchkov, 1996a and 1996b; Bobkov, 1995, p. 370). Sometimes a masonic plot is added to this scenario (Valovoi, 1993, pp. 134–135). Another group consists of more respectable authors interweaving innuendo with factual narrative that often directly contradicts their own dark hints. These include Boldin (see the preceding note); Ryzhkov (1994) revising his memoirs; and Pavlov (1995).

⁴⁴ The KGB and GRU regarded Yakovlev as a US agent (Boldin, 1995, pp. 263–266). According to Vorotnikov (1995, p. 434) in his speech of 17 June 1991 at the USSR Supreme Soviet, Kryuchkov implied that G. Popov, then mayor of Moscow, was a CIA agent. (This accusation is not in the published text—see Kryuchkov, 1996b, pp. 387–392. Possibly this is a result of what Kryuchkov describes as 'small cuts' in the published version.)

⁴⁵ In the corresponding section in the Russian edition of this book Boldin ascribes this role to Yakovlev and Medvedev (Boldin, 1995, p. 153). Elsewhere in the Russian edition, however, he observes that 'the basic ideas of *perestroika* were formulated by A.N. Yakovlev' (Boldin, 1995, p. 165).

⁴⁶ A lengthy extract from this letter is in Yakovlev, 1994, pp. 205–212.

⁴⁷ This was, *ex post*, also the view of A.S. Chernyaev (Chernyaev, 1993, p. 32).

⁴⁸ Chernyaev's account of this meeting differs substantially from that of Vorotnikov (Vorotnikov, 1995, pp. 356–357).

⁴⁹ A 'round table' with representatives of the republics, to work out new relations between the centre and the republics, was called for a month later, in a memo to Gorbachev dated 5 April 1990, by Yakovlev and others (for the full text see Shakhnazarov, 1993, pp. 463–465).

⁵⁰ See the long interview with him on pp. 65–94 of Nenashev (1993). The passage cited in the text is on page 73.

⁵¹ Vorotnikov's account of this Politburo meeting differs substantially from Chernyaev's account (Vorotnikov, 1995, pp. 346–347).

⁵² He was elected President on 15 March 1990, thus fulfilling a more than two-year old ambition (Chernyaev, 1993, p. 210).

⁵³ In the summer of 1990 he had to agree that the Union party leader should continue to have the title of general secretary rather than chairman (Gorbachev, 1995b, p. 543). The first important issue on which Gorbachev was defeated by a vote in a party forum concerned the choice of a leader for the newly created Russian Communist Party. Polozkov was chosen at its founding congress in June 1990, although Gorbachev had expressed a preference for Kuptsov. While important, this outcome did not affect the main line of Gorbachev's policies.

⁵⁴ '...the "recoil variant"...was connected with the attempt to reanimate the administrative system, to return to 1985 (we clearly understood that the recoil would not stop at that date and would continue right up to 1937)' (Abalkin, 1991, p. 121).

⁵⁵ This phrase comes from the covering letter to Ryzhkov (Abalkin, 1991, p. 122).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Ryzhkov (1992, p. 329 and 1995, pp. 440–441) puts the total number of proposals reviewed at 87. According to Abalkin and Gorbachev, Aganbegyan reviewed 13 reform proposals out of around 40 available (*Istoricheskie...*, 1995, pp. 24–25).

References

- L. Abalkin, *Neispol'zovannyi shans* (Moscow, Politizdat, 1991).
- V. Afanaseev, *Chetvertaya vlast' i chetyre genseka* (Moscow, Kedr, 1994).
- Sergei Akhromeev & Georgii Kornienko, *Glazami marshala i diplomata* (Moscow, Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1992).
- A. M. Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva* (Moscow, Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1994).
- G. A. Arbatov, *The System* (New York, Times Books, 1992).
- N. K. Baibakov, *Sorok let v pravitel'stve* (Moscow, Respublika, 1993).
- V. Bakatin, in Nenashev, 1993.
- F. D. Bobkov, *KGB i vlast'* (Moscow, Veteran MP, 1995).
- Valery Boldin, *Ten Years That Shook the World* (New York, Basic Books, 1994).
- V. Boldin, *Krushenie p'edestala* (Moscow, Respublika, 1995).
- E. Chazov, *Zdorov'e i vlast'* (Moscow, Novosti, 1992).
- A. S. Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym* (Moscow, Kul'tura, 1993).
- A. Dobrynin, *In confidence* (New York, Random House, 1995).
- B. El'tsin, *Zapiski prezidenta* (Moscow, Ogonek, 1994).
- E. Gaider, *Dni porazhenii i pobed* (Moscow, Vagrius, 1996).
- Alexander Gerschenkron, 'Ideology as a System Determinant', in Alexander Eckstein (ed.), *Comparison of Economic Systems* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971).
- M. Gorbachev, 'Andropov: Novyi general'nyi sekretar' deistvuet', *Svobodnaya mysl'*, 1995a, 11.
- M. Gorbachev, *Zhizn' i reformy*, vol. 1 (Moscow, Novosti, 1995b).
- M. Gorbachev, *Zhizn' i reformy*, vol. 2 (Moscow, Novosti, 1995c).
- A. Grachev, *Dal'she bez menya...ukhod prezidenta* (Moscow, Progress-Kul'tura, 1994a).
- A. Grachev, *Kremlevskaya khronika* (Moscow, Eksmo, 1994b).
- Aleksei Grishin, 'V ego stikhakh bylo mnogo ostrykh slovechek', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 21 June 1994.
- V. V. Grishin, *Ot Khrushcheva do Gorbacheva* (Moscow, ASPOL, 1996).
- Istoricheskie sud'by radikal'noi ekonomicheskoi reformy* (Prague, Laguna, 1995).
- Evgenii Kalgin, 'Prozhivi on eshche dva-tri goda...', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 21 June 1994.
- Oleg Kalugin, *Proshchai, Lubyanka!* (Moscow, Olimp, 1995).
- F. K. Katushev, 'Samoe vrednoe—primerivat' na sebya chuzhie modeli i ignorirovat' sobstvennyi opyt', in Nenashev, 1993.
- G. M. Kornienko, *Kholodnaya voina* (Moscow, Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1995).
- A. A. Korobeinikov, *Gorbachev: drugoe litso* (Moscow, Respublika, 1996).
- Andrei Kozyrev, *Preobrazhenie* (Moscow, Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1995).
- V. Kryuchkov, *Lichnoe delo*, part 1 (Moscow, Olimp, 1996a).
- V. Kryuchkov, *Lichnoe delo*, part 2 (Moscow, Olimp, 1996b).
- D. A. Kunaev, *O moem vremeni* (Alma Ata, Deuir, 1992).
- D. A. Kunaev, *Ot Stalina do Gorbacheva* (Almaty, Sanat, 1994).
- Laurie Kurtzweg, 'Trends in Soviet Gross National Product', in US Congress, Joint Economic Committee, *Gorbachev's Economic Plans*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC, GPO, 1987).
- D. Lane, 'The Gorbachev revolution: the role of the political elite in regime disintegration', *Political Studies*, 44, 1, 1996.
- Otto Latsis, 'Neuslyshannoe preduprezhdenie', *Izvestiya*, 27 August 1993.
- E. Ligachev, 'Rastit' aktivnykh bortsov perestroiki', *Uchitel'skaya gazeta*, 27 August 1987.
- E. K. Ligachev, *Zagadka Gorbacheva* (Novosibirsk, SP Interbuk, 1992).
- Vitalii Marsov, 'Mikhail Gorbachev: "Andropov ne poshel by daleko v reformirovani obshchestva"', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 11 November 1992.
- Yurii Maslyukov, 'Ekonomike—upravlyaemost', obshchestvu—spravedlivost', *Pravda*, 7 December 1995.
- Vadim Medvedev, *V komande Gorbacheva* (Moscow, Bylina, 1994).
- M. Nenashev, *Poslednee pravitel'stvo SSSR: lichnosti, svidetel'stva, dialogi* (Moscow, AO "Krom", 1993).
- L. Onikov, *KPSS: anatomiya raspada* (Moscow, Respublika, 1996).
- Boris Pankin, *Sto oborvannykh dnei* (Moscow, Sovershenno sekretno, 1993).
- Valentin Pavlov, *Avgust iznutri* (Moscow, Delovoi mir, 1993).
- Valentin Pavlov, 'V povestke dnya stoyala burzhuazno-demokraticeskaya revolyutsiya', *Segodnya*, 29 November 1994.
- Valentin Pavlov, *Upushchen li shans?* (Moscow, Terra, 1995).
- V. Pechenev, *Vzlet i padenie Gorbacheva* (Moscow, Respublika, 1996).

- N. Petrakov, 'I vot prishel Gorbachev...', *Trud*, 7 April 1995.
- G. Popov, *Snova v opozitsii* (Moscow, Galaktika, 1994).
- A. Prokhanov, 'U vlasti stoyal predatel', *Zavtra*, 1995, 30.
- N. I. Ryzhkov, 'O programme predstoyashchei deyatel'nosti pravitel'stva SSSR', *Izvestiya*, 8 June 1989.
- Nikolai Ryzhkov, *Perestroika: istoriya predatel'stv* (Moscow, Novosti, 1992).
- Nikolai Ryzhkov, 'Okayannye dni reform', *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 8 December 1994.
- Nikolai Ryzhkov, *Desyat' let velikikh potryasenii* (Moscow, Assotsiatsiya "Kniga. Prosveshchenie. Miloserdie", 1995).
- Roald Z. Sagdeev, *The Making of a Soviet Scientist* (New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1994).
- G. Shakhnazarov, *Tsena svobody* (Moscow, Rossika, 1993).
- S. Shatalin, "'500 dnei" i drugie dnei moei zhizni', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 31 March and 2 April 1992.
- Eduard Shevardnadze, *Moi vybor* (Moscow, Novosti, 1991).
- Vladimir Shcherbakov, 'Dazhe martyshka ne stanet glotat' neznakomye plody', *Izvestiya*, 15 December 1995.
- Dmitrii Valovoi, *Kremlevskii tupik i Nazarbaev* (Moscow, Molodaya gvardiya, 1993).
- Kira Vladina, 'Ded epokhi', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 10 August 1994.
- V. I. Vorotnikov, *A bylo eto tak...* (Moscow, 'Sovet veteranov knigoizdaniya' Si-Mar, 1995).
- Vitalii Vorotnikov, 'Stranu derzhit inertsia sotsializma', *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 20 January 1996.
- S. White *et al.*, 'Interviewing the Soviet elite', *The Russian Review*, 55, 2, April 1996.
- A. N. Yakovlev, *Predislovie. Obval. Posleslovie* (Moscow, Novosti, 1992).
- A. N. Yakovlev, *Gor'kaya chasha* (Yaroslavl', Verkhne-Volzhscoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1994).
- L. M. Zamyatin, *Gorby i Maggie* (Moscow, PIK VINITI, 1995).