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The Glasnost Papers

Voices on Reform from Moscow

edited by
Andrei Melville and Gail W. Lapidus

Дорогие
Германии, желеае
структивными ре-
му продвижению
съезд проходит вс-
оно повсеместно со-
ми, так и всеми дру-
Крушение в некото-
Европы существова-
циализма, необходим
вопросов подвергают
литику и организаци-
ты на новые вопросы,
гельса, Ленина, не от-
какие выдержали прове-
жизнь политику на благо
Мы желеам вам, чтобы
крыл советскому народу
третье тысячелетие. Наша
проанализировать результа-
очередь воспринять от него
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бенно сегодня для того, что
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Международное коммунисти-
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меет разработать общественную
питализм не будет последним вы-
бежна опасность гибели. Социали-

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в котором он сегод-
гими искать новые ответ-
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плюралистической демократии, право всех народов самим
ния экологических проблем и право всех народов самим
лять свою судьбу.
Столкнувшись с тем, что на протяжении 1980-х годов крайне
реакционное правительство Тэтчер оказалось способным одержи-
вать победы на выборах, навязывая британскому обществу непо-
пулярные изменения, наша партия была вынуждена переосмыс-
лить многие основополагающие вопросы. Мы надеемся на углуб-
ление диалога со всеми, кто обеспокоен будущим человечества
как в Великобритании, так и во всем мире.

КОММУНИСТИЧЕСКАЯ ПАРТИЯ ВЕЛИКОБРИТАНИИ
XXVIII СЪЕЗДУ КОММУНИСТИЧЕСКОЙ
ПАРТИИ СОВЕТСКОГО СОЮЗА

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Благодаря новому политическому мыш-
ления в деле осуществления ядерного и химическо-
осуществления доверия, использования г-
более сложных современных
региональных.

Westview Press

The Glasnost Papers

Voices on Reform from Moscow

**edited by Andrei Melville
and Gail W. Lapidus**

**compiled and with a commentary by
O. Aliakrinskii, S. Filatov, P. Gladkov, I. Isakova,
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*Gail W. Lapidus
Andrei Melville*

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ANDREI MELVILLE

A Personal Introduction

I want to begin with myself. For the first time in my life I feel optimistic and hopeful. Of course, I am not alone in this. There is a spirit of change in the air, of social upheaval. After many years of lethargy, Soviet society is finally on the move.

For me now my country is the most interesting place in the world. This feeling is shared by a great many people, and not just here in the USSR. I can barely remember 1956 and the 20th Party Congress (I was just six years old at that time), but the atmosphere of enthusiasm in the early 1960s and the ensuing bitterness at the end of that decade are preserved in my memory. People of an older generation will sometimes say that enthusiasms and letdowns in society are nothing unusual. And yet, I am convinced that I am living through a unique time in the history of my country, a time of dramatic transformation.

Human beings are by nature conservative, and many people feel uneasy when their usual way of life changes, when the established order of things collapses. But when you know that you cannot continue in the old way, and when you see that the old way of doing things cannot be improved, no matter how hard you try; when you know that change is the only way out, and you are anticipating this change with eagerness and hope, then the time has come for a radical solution—to break with the old ways and create new ones. One might call this “revolution.”

History knows various types of revolution, including ones not necessarily accompanied by bloodshed. For example, the New Deal of Franklin Delano Roosevelt was, in its own way, revolutionary in scale. I would like to believe that what is going on in my own country will become revolutionary in much the same way. Of course there are no barricades in the streets, but an intense struggle—both political and ideological—is taking place. And those in the Soviet Union who want

radical, revolutionary changes in our society are no longer satisfied with attempts simply to “improve” the model of socialism that we inherited from the past. They want to dismantle it and create a new, different society.

Thus we are not talking about re-papering the walls of an old house and refurnishing it but about erecting a completely new structure on the same foundation. Yes, our foundation will remain socialist, but we want to build an entirely different model of socialism upon it.

It strikes me that this is precisely what distinguishes events today from those of other periods in our postwar history when the country was likewise moving forward. For in actual fact, in the 1950s and early 1960s, society’s attention was focused on the figure of Stalin, and the problem we faced was diagnosed as the “cult of personality” and its consequences: that is, not a social pathology but rather a malignant growth on a healthy body.

Today everything is different. Today we perceive the fundamental problem neither in particular personalities nor in the wrongdoings and even crimes of one or another leader. And although our press today is actively involved in exposing highly placed officials of the not-too-distant past, it is not primarily this that has riveted people’s attention. These are all symptoms of a disease, not the disease itself, which goes far deeper. Because this is a disease of the system, a disease of the society, and not simply of the individual, the medicine used to cure it will have to be potent. The question today is not about the window dressing of the system’s functioning but about the very nature of its internal characteristics.

In the past, when we in the Soviet Union talked about socialism, all too often we substituted the ideal for the real as we tried to draw, down to the tiniest detail, the image of the ideal socialist society and, as it were, project it onto ourselves, for the most part ignoring the crying incompatibility between that ideal and reality. Today, with a much more sober and critical view of the reality with which we are dealing in our country, we are trying also to liberate our notions of the socialist ideal from the traditional utopianism, from the millenarian-chilastic myths about an approaching “thousand-year kingdom” of Good and Justice.

So what remains unshakable in that foundation on which we are preparing to build a new social structure? I suppose it is the main features that distinguish the socialist ideal from other historical social structures, namely public (i.e., state and cooperative) ownership of the means of production and the absence of antagonistic classes and economic exploitation of human labor. Every possible new socialist model makes and will continue to make its “contribution,” but in principle these characteristics will remain an integral part of socialism.

A great many people who were socialized and initiated into public life during the 1970s had the nagging feeling that all kinds of problems were piling up, were not being solved, and were looming ever larger. At first timid, we grew ever more determined in our conviction that the extreme crisis situation toward which our society and all its elements—the economy, social relations, political institutions, the intellectual sphere—were heading posed a grave threat. And all of this proceeded against a background of hypocritical self-glorification and panegyrics that no one even believed anymore, probably not even those who wrote them.

Thus, when Mikhail Gorbachev began to speak openly about the crisis situation in the country, most of us, despite the gravity of what he was saying, breathed a sigh of relief. Finally we stopped hiding what was painful and began speaking the truth out loud, saying what we were feeling and thinking.

Again let me stress that the majority of us had already sensed with our whole being this crisis situation developing, but we lacked knowledge and information. Go into any store, and you would feel it: In the economy, in management, there was discord, disorder. But as to what was really going on in the economy, you could not tell—in the newspapers and from the podiums you could hear only of achievements and accomplishments. You would encounter red tape and bureaucracy, a flagrant contempt for what should have been, by law, your rights and interests, and you would feel that all was not well, so to speak, in the social and political arena. But what exactly was wrong and how widespread was the problem, you could not know. And of events in the world, their whys and wherefores, you would not have an inkling from the newspapers or from the radio or television. Hence we had rumors and gossip, a virtual kingdom of hearsay, as if we were not even living in the twentieth century.

That is the way it was—and not just among the so-called ordinary people. Among professionals and intellectuals the situation was similar. True, in their own narrow fields they could still get some information, but under no circumstances were they allowed to look beyond that. At a library they could not usually take out a foreign book unless it was in their limited field of specialization.

It is tempting to use the familiar cliché “closed society” and to say, in effect, that nothing can be expected from such a society. However, even in those years of social lethargy everything was far from one-dimensional. In short, today, even as we subject ourselves to self-criticism, we should not simply dye the white black, or vice versa. We must see the variety of colors that always surrounded and now surround us.

In the West the Soviet Union has often been described as a one-dimensional society devoid of nuances or distinctions, a “totalitarian” society where everything is regulated from above, a society of universal conformity. In all honesty, I cannot lay all of the blame for the creation of this image on Western critics. Obviously one cannot dismiss the fact that there are influential figures and groups in the West who have vested interests in the image of the Soviet Union as “the enemy.” Nevertheless, a certain degree of responsibility for this image must also be laid upon our own orthodox ideologues, who have propagandized about the unfettered “monolithic unity” of Soviet society in which all people say only “yes.”

But no matter what our demagogues or yours might say, in reality Soviet society has never been one-dimensional. A diversity of opinions, viewpoints, and intellectual currents has always existed. There have been disagreements as well as dissonance on all levels of Soviet society, as is the case in any normal society.

Of course, there have been periods (encompassing, unfortunately, a large portion of our history) when we have been forcibly compelled to think and act “like everyone else,” when disagreements and dissonance were suppressed. But even then we always understood what was what and who was who and knew how to read between the lines even when we could barely read. And naturally there have also been periods (these occurred much less frequently) in Soviet history when, as it were, the floodgates have opened up and diversity, disagreements, and discussions have been welcomed. This was the situation during the de-Stalinization of the 1950s and the reforms of the early 1960s.

Speaking of this period, I feel compelled to mention the name of Nikita Khrushchev, one of the most ambiguous figures in Soviet history. Whatever one might think of his extravagances and, to put it mildly, his ill-considered actions (and although he himself was a product, in a sense, of the Stalinist system), his role—both political and psychological—in undermining Stalinist totalitarianism and creating, even perhaps unconsciously, the basis for a future democratic movement, was considerable.

During the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, while the official rhetoric was busy polishing its fictitious propagandistic images, we continued to argue—usually among close friends—about our country’s social ills. That our economy was stagnating (or whatever scholars might choose to call it) and that technologically we were lagging behind other developed countries (and not just Western countries) were becoming increasingly visible realities. We would lower our voices to talk about corruption, including corruption at the very top. We touched on various social pathologies as well: alcoholism, drug abuse, crime, van-

dalism, prostitution. We endured, intensely and bitterly, the almost ritualistic unresponsiveness on the part of our leadership, sensing in ourselves a deepening rift between expectations and reality, word and deed. We experienced a crisis of confidence in everything official—leaders, institutions of power, phraseology.

For some, conformity became an outlet. Others found a safety valve in their private lives, withdrawing into their particular interests, the enclosed world of their personal lives. But many others did not find an escape. There was growing alienation, apathy, and cynicism. People saw that an enormous and ineffective “welfare state” had been created that was excessive and inadequate. As a result, the work ethic itself was being eroded, with people becoming psychologically dependent on social guarantees, and very mediocre guarantees at that. At times the sense of arbitrariness and injustice spilled over into unconscious and poorly focused resentment. In short, these were not failures confined to a single sphere within the system; these were signs of a crisis of the system, which in turn led to the delegitimization of the official structures of the regime. The point is that the stagnation of the regime in the 1970s and early 1980s, and the decay—first and foremost of official structures—that accompanied stagnation still could not completely frustrate and obstruct the vitality of society.

During those years we were developing into a more modern, urban society. The population was growing ever more mobile. People were becoming better educated, and there was an increase in the number of professionals in the population. The standard of living was rising, and people were, I might mention, growing accustomed to this. Needs and expectations were growing quickly, and they were increasingly less likely to be satisfied or realized.

A variety of changes was also occurring in people's value systems. The poverty of meaning in the official rhetoric engendered a sort of spontaneous de-ideologization in the minds of many. People were drawn to moral and ethical questions about the human condition. Interests were becoming particularized, disconnected from one another, as if subject to some centrifugal force. It was only gradually and with difficulty that many people were overcoming some of the traditions of Russian-Soviet political culture and coming to the realization that diversity and pluralism in the life of a society are inevitable and natural.

Even while the word “pluralism” was still being used in quotation marks—as an indication of its “bourgeois” nature—we ourselves, though we did not use the word, were by degrees growing accustomed to the reality of diversity—diversity of life-styles and orientations, of interests and enthusiasms, of opinions and ideas. We were gradually becoming accustomed to somewhat broader definitions of individual rights as well

as to the reality of diverse and often conflicting interests of different groups, in particular of "informal groups," as they were called by the media. The great majority of these groups were not at all political in nature, and their informality indicated that they had sprung up spontaneously—not by decree from above, but by their own initiative, as should be the case in any normal society (today, by official estimates, they number up to 30,000).

There was also growing autonomy in the sphere of information. On an unofficial level there arose alternative communications systems: People listened more and more often to foreign broadcasts on shortwave radio; they passed around unofficial printed matter, including foreign publications; video technology became more widespread; various types of contacts with foreigners, here and abroad, were increasing.

An independent public opinion was also taking shape, with an emphasis on social and ethical questions. And as this developing public opinion grew more and more active, it began to influence political decisions. For example, the campaign opposing a plan to divert the northern rivers, which at first seemed to be purely an economic and ecological cause, acquired a certain political significance.

Thus, even during the period of stagnation certain processes were developing at society's core; the preconditions were evolving for change, for overcoming the authoritarian-patriarchal order of things, for breaking through to modernity. And periodically one could glimpse, through the official varnishing of reality, those colors that were destined to determine the face of an emerging Soviet society. At the same time these pressures for changes at the deepest level of society often went against the grain of processes at the official, state level. In other words, there was a growing rift between the society and the state, between the people and the regime.

Seventy years after the October Revolution, the crisis situation had taken on a threatening aspect. We found ourselves at a crossroads in the fullest sense of the word. But many people didn't see any way out. A great many, of course, dreamed of changes, but when they tried to grasp the big picture, they almost lost heart: Changes were needed not just here and there, but everywhere.

The words with which Gorbachev addressed the country shook both the sleepers and the skeptics: We were on the brink of a dangerous precipice. The continuation of our old policies would lead us into a dead end; radical changes—both strategic and programmatic—were needed. But the solutions were not immediately forthcoming. At first, the focus was on attempting to force at least a few of the old social mechanisms to function differently under new conditions. Harsh measures were introduced against corruption and alcoholism and in favor

of increased discipline. The measures were drastic and severe indeed. A definite effect, if only temporary and limited, was achieved fairly quickly; in any case, some disgraceful things that had been common in the past were diminished or ceased entirely. Further, these measures showed that the new leadership was serious in its intentions and would act decisively.

The new direction was identified with a term that was advanced for the first time: acceleration (*uskorenie*). In other words, it was thought that the pace of development had to be changed in order to pull society out of the mire of stagnation. Gradually, however, it became obvious that this was hardly the single, universal means of solving all the problems facing us. In a word, you cannot speed something up if it is not moving to begin with. First, it was necessary to clear aside the old obstacles and to create new mechanisms that would establish a new course and movement. Moreover, all this had to be done to a living social organism, one that could not be removed from circulation for repairs and could not be isolated from the external world.

So it was that in the process of radicalizing the reform impulse, the concept of perestroika was born: a program for the revolutionary restructuring of the entire society from the ground up. As Gorbachev said, perestroika is revolution. What we are trying to accomplish today is a radical break with the old society and the creation of a new one. This will not happen without intense conflicts between the old and the new. We have begun an immense experiment, whose very essence—the creation of a new society—strikes me as consonant with the spirit and psychology of America, that great land of innovators and first-comers. We do not want to build utopian schemes and rigid plans, because we know that “politics is the art of the possible.” We do not have ready prescriptions for every situation, and there are no guarantees against mistakes. But seventy years after the October Revolution, this is the most interesting and dramatic period yet, both in its scale and in its social complexity; it is a potential watershed in the history of socialism, not only in the USSR but in other countries as well. Perestroika should reveal how and to what extent socialism today is capable of radical internal transformations and reform, whether it is possible to replace authoritarian, dogmatic socialism with a socialism that is free and democratic.

Not only do we believe that this is possible; we believe that for us it is the only solution. But we also recognize that it remains to be demonstrated in practice. In that sense, the fundamental question of our revolution today is in principle an open one: Is it possible to radically change the system that we inherited from the past? This is an open question not because we have doubts, but because we have never before

attempted such sweeping changes. In the past, the system has functioned only in one mode of operation—an authoritarian, dogmatic system of administrative decrees. Now we want to transform society and switch it to another mode of operation. This aim presents a formidable challenge.

At times people say that we should return to Leninism, which was trampled on and distorted by Stalinism. And it is true that we must rehabilitate and restore our fundamentals before we can conceive of moving forward. But we also realize that we cannot look to the past for solutions to all the problems that we now face, many of which were unheard of in the past. Simply to copy the past, as Gorbachev has emphasized, would be the worst form of dogmatism; today we need bold quests for new solutions.

A completely justified question then arises: Where are these solutions to come from? Are they to come from the emancipated initiative of those below or from the enlightened impulse of those above? In fact, on this question we can now find adherents of both points of view. At times you even sense a kind of paradox: Democratization and decentralization of our society are difficult to accomplish without relying on a strong, authoritarian central power. For this reason “Gorbachev’s revolution” is sometimes referred to as a “revolution from above.”

There is a wealth of precedent for this type of revolution in our history. But revolution from above is not simply a coup d’état, a spontaneous impulse for fundamental social change initiated and directed by the country’s leadership. There is an element of this, to be sure; the figure of a leader often proves to be a factor of enormous significance, as is the case with Gorbachev. But “Gorbachev’s revolution” is not a one-man show. It is a movement of like-minded people at various levels of society. Its success depends on a “revolution from below,” a broad-based and diverse coalition for reform.

It is difficult to believe that a revolution from above could be successful were it not met halfway from below and were it not supported by a mass movement. That movement itself can be internally heterogeneous, which lends it a special strength. In our case, perestroika is supported by various economic, political, ideological, and other forces and interests—not all of them necessarily in agreement about everything. But the main thing is that they are all moving emphatically in the same direction toward the radical reform of society.

What exactly are these forces and interests? First, there are those groups within the party that initiated the revolutionary changes. Then, of course, there are also many among the intelligentsia who yearn for the democratization of society. There are the professionals, especially the young ones, who aspire to modernize society and to create an environment in which they can better realize their own personal po-

tential. There are those whose goal is the ideological purification of Marxism-Leninism, who want to rid it of the distortions and corruptions of the Stalinist era and the ensuing years. There are members of the military profession for whom industrial and scientific-technological development represents the only means of maintaining the country's security. Finally, there are also those heterogeneous national groups that are either dissatisfied with the state's decline or see in perestroika the only way to fulfill their national aspirations. It is impossible to name all the groups supporting perestroika. But the point is that a variety of people today are coming out in support of the restructuring and democratization of the entire society.

Sometimes observers in the West express the hope that the process of change in Soviet society will lead to its liberalization. It is a well-known fact that political categories such as liberalism and conservatism are employed differently in different political cultures. For this reason, those in the Soviet Union whom the West call "liberals" are not necessarily liberals in the traditional Western sense of the word. In our case, when one speaks of "liberalizing" the system, what one often has in mind is a mere "loosening of the bolts." But in reality we want much more—not just a slight weakening of the old system but its fundamental restructuring. It is for this reason that we seek not liberalization but fundamental democratization of the whole society, its political system and its social structures. And that, in turn, implies the institutionalization of political reforms as well as fundamental changes in the political culture that we inherited from the past.

We are often asked: And how do you define democracy, what meaning does that concept have for you today? My own view is that when we speak of the democratization of Soviet society, we have in mind two dimensions of democracy: the universal and the specific. Democracy in any society, under any conditions, implies some general, universal principles: democratic freedoms, civil and social rights, and so forth. But at the same time democracy is a relative concept determined by historical, cultural, and national traditions, which, naturally, are different in different countries and among different peoples. Therefore it is hardly worth fostering hopes that sooner or later everything will be reduced to a single common denominator. Even after the implementation of all the proposed changes in the USSR, and even in the case of their complete success (and the obstacles in their path are enormous), we will not become the same type of society as, for example, the United States. Our economy, our political system, our way of life—all will retain our stamp.

Today our slogan is, "Learning democracy!" This is precisely how Gorbachev has formulated one of our fundamental tasks. "What do you

mean by that?" many people ask us. We spent seventy years trying to convince ourselves and others that the Soviet Union was the most democratic state in the world, that we should be proud of our democracy. Whether we always believed this is no longer important. Many believed, while others did not. What is important is that we want much more democracy. To us, more democracy means more socialism, but a different kind of socialism—not authoritarian-administrative, but free and democratic.

The democratic revolution that has begun in our country, like any revolution, conflicts with many private interests both of groups and of individuals. Revolution is impossible without opposition. So here too, while the majority of people have long been convinced that we could no longer continue in the old ways, not everyone has taken an enthusiastic view of Gorbachev's revolution.

The danger is posed not so much by organized opposition (which, to tell the truth, is hardly visible) as by passive resistance, boycotting, and social inertia. This opposition most resembles cotton wadding: There are almost no open collisions, but movement forward becomes incredibly difficult, impeded, deflected. The long-awaited laws are enacted but never carried out; radical declarations are pronounced but come to nothing. Let us be honest: There is political and ideological conflict in Soviet society, and it will not die down soon. More likely the opposite will happen. The opponents of reform did not at first believe that their interests were threatened. When they realized, when they understood, the opposition became tougher and, I would say, smarter. And their counterarguments began to appear: "We could go too far with this democracy," "We should not shake the foundations," "We would not want to lose the principles we hold dear," and so forth.

Of course we are all children of the age, products of our social conditions. Even those of us who ardently believe in radical reform find it hard (to use Lenin's phrase) "to squeeze the slave out of ourselves," to overcome the forces of conservatism and inertia in our thinking. But in speaking about opposition and resistance to democratic revolution we should not stop here. We must talk about the concrete interests that stand in the way of change. Who exactly is "against" it?

The bureaucracies within the party and the state defending their own privileged sphere are naturally against democratic reforms. And then there are the doctrinaire ideologues, and not necessarily just professional ones, who imbibed with their mothers' milk a rigid set of stereotypes and who jealously guard its "purity." All sorts of crooks are also against reform—those shady elements who warm their hands over the flames of the corruption, venality, and criminality of the stagnated regime. Sometimes these are crooks on a large scale, who are an integral part

of the state apparatus and have become a powerful mafia. There are likewise many groups whose particular interests—and not just material interests—are threatened by perestroika and glasnost.

But perhaps the biggest problem is presented by ordinary people (including ourselves) who are faced with the prospect of having to change radically their opinions and habits, and above all, their attitudes toward work, toward their responsibilities and rights—in short, toward their customary interrelations with society and the state. This unavoidable problem arises so sharply because there is in the very logic of perestroika a kind of paradox: The long-term, radical transformation of our society may in the short term (or possibly in the medium term) demand measures that will have unfavorable economic and social consequences—a rise in prices, bankruptcy, the prospect of relative unemployment, a rise in inequality of wages, and so forth. We are not used to dealing with such problems, and we have much to learn.

We are waking up from long years of sleep, becoming active, responsible, enterprising, capable of shouldering the responsibility for ourselves as well as for society. We can no longer delegate that responsibility, as we have in the past, to some sort of abstraction that exists above and beyond the individual—to a group, a collective, an organization, a society. Today we make our own decisions. And this is an unusual situation for Russian-Soviet political culture. Five, ten, or fifteen years ago I knew exactly what was permissible and what was not; I knew exactly where the boundaries were drawn between the prohibited and the possible. Today I do not know this anymore, because society itself has been transformed. And today I must determine for myself what I think I can and should do. For example, in my books and articles I never intentionally deceived my readers, but, clearly, I was not able to say everything I wanted to because of external and internal censorship. Today I may not be concerned about censorship, but I do not know what the limits of glasnost are, and nobody will tell me. I have to decide for myself, which is sometimes very difficult politically and emotionally. I may very well be reprimanded for my decisions, but nonetheless nobody will make them for me. In making these choices, each person, by his or her very actions, either narrows the range of his or her freedom or broadens it and extends the possibilities in society from within the society itself.

The main instrument of democratization today is openness, glasnost. Real democratization is unthinkable without the creation of new democratic institutions and without structural changes in political, social, and public life; in short, organizationally secured changes are needed. Glasnost is the path to this type of change. More than anything, people want to know the truth, no matter how painful, that has been concealed