

Politics,  
Society, and  
Nationality

# INSIDE GORBACHEV'S RUSSIA

Edited by Seweryn Bialer



AN EAST-WEST FORUM PUBLICATION

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# Politics, Society, and Nationality Inside Gorbachev's Russia

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EDITED BY  
Seweryn Bialer

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## About the Contributors

**Seweryn Bialer** is the Robert and Renee Belfer Professor of Social Sciences and International Relations and director of the Research Institute on International Change at Columbia University. He is the author of *Stalin's Successors* and *The Soviet Paradox*, as well as the editor of several collected works on Soviet foreign and domestic policies—the most recent of which is *Gorbachev's Russia and American Foreign Policy* (Westview, 1988).

**Archie Brown** is a Fellow of St. Antony's College and a lecturer on Soviet institutions at Oxford University. He is an expert on Soviet politics, ideology, and political culture, and is the author of numerous works, the most recent of which is *Political Culture and Communist Studies*.

**Peter Hauslohner** is assistant professor of political science at Yale University and the author of a forthcoming work on the origins, maintenance, and decline of the first post-Stalin "social contract."

**Gail W. Lapidus** is professor of political science at the University of California at Berkeley and directs the Berkeley-Stanford Program on Soviet International Behavior. She is the author of numerous studies on Soviet politics and foreign policy and the author of a forthcoming work on Soviet nationality policy.

**Alexander J. Motyl** is assistant professor of political science at Columbia University and director of the program in nationality and Siberian studies of the W. Averell Harriman Institute for Advanced Study of the Soviet Union. He is the author of *Will the Non-Russians Rebel?* and of the forthcoming study, *Sovietology, Rationality, Nationality: Coming to Grips with Nationalism in the USSR*.

**Laurie P. Salitan** is assistant professor of political science at The Johns Hopkins University and chair of the W. Averell Harriman Institute's Seminar on Soviet Republics and Regional Issues. She is the author of the forthcoming book, *The Politics of Contemporary Soviet Emigration*.

## Preface

The East-West Forum is a New York-based research and policy analysis organization sponsored by the Samuel Bronfman Foundation. Its goal is to bring together experts and policy leaders from differing perspectives and generations to discuss changing patterns of East-West relations. It attempts to formulate long-term analyses and recommendations.

In preparing the chapters of this book, the authors, as with our earlier work *Gorbachev's Russia and American Foreign Policy*, drew upon a series of workshops initiated by the Forum. Aside from the authors, workshop participants included Jeremy Azrael, Donna Bahry, Joseph Berliner, Robert Campbell, Timothy Colton, Robert Cullen, Fritz Ermarth, Sheila Fitzpatrick, John Gaddis, Gregory Grossman, Thane Gustafson, Mark von Hagen, Arthur Hartman, Grey Hodnett, Stanley Hoffmann, Robert Hormats, William Hyland, Alex Inkeles, Robert Legvold, William Luers, I. Mac Destler, Michael Mandelbaum, Mary McAuley, Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Robert Osgood, William Schneider, Jutta Scherrer, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, S. Frederick Starr, Fritz Stern, William Taubman, and Ted Warner.

As in the past, the East-West Forum would like also to express thanks to Stephen E. Herbits, Executive Vice President, Joseph E. Seagram and Sons, Inc.; William K Friedman, Trustee of the Samuel Bronfman Foundation; and David E. Morey, Associate Executive Director, the East-West Forum, as well as to Thomas Sherlock, the Forum's rapporteur, and to Anne Mandelbaum for her editorial work.

*James M. Montgomery*  
Executive Director  
East-West Forum

# Introduction

As all the world knows, Mikhail Gorbachev, since assuming power in March 1985, has pursued a program of reform that—even if its major objectives should fail—will change fundamentally the social, political, and economic character of the Soviet Union.

The Gorbachev Era has already begun to provide opportunities for improved superpower relations. To be sure, there remains a serious gap between Soviet rhetoric and Soviet reality. Many more political events must unfold and survive the test of time before we see reliable signs that the historical patterns of military threat and global political competition have begun to change. Yet, clearly, the landscape has been altered. The challenge to U.S. policy leaders is to exploit the opportunities, while recognizing and avoiding the dangers.

The East-West Forum seeks to advance a clear and accurate understanding of today's Soviet Union and contribute thereby to the long-term management of East-West relations. In its first book, *Gorbachev's Russia and American Foreign Policy*, the Forum examined the implications of Gorbachev's proposed reforms in light of the aims of U.S. policies. In this volume the authors look at the dynamics of those reforms from within the Soviet system itself.

To what extent can these policies gain acceptance and succeed? What, in fact, does success mean? What are the fundamental political, societal, and nationality factors that might influence Gorbachev's program? And finally, to what extent might his reforms be reversible?

Developments in Gorbachev's Soviet Union pose a particular problem for Americans. They must steer a careful course between unwonted optimism and cynicism. Much of what Gorbachev is doing and saying resonates comfortably with U.S. observers: "openness," "democracy," "restructuring." In Soviet terms, by contrast, these concepts are startling and revolutionary. They presage a dramatic change in Soviet conditions and Soviet thought. In this sense, some optimism—or at least an acknowledgment that things are different—is in order.

But as encouraged by the reform rhetoric as Americans may be, they must also recognize that what is happening in Moscow, measured in U.S. terms, remains very limited. Gorbachev is not proposing to change

the Communist Party's exclusive political control over all aspects of Soviet life. He is instead urging that it be more responsive to the people's needs and desires. He is not saying that the Communist Party should be accountable to Soviet citizens in any fashion that Americans understand. Rather, to those with entrenched interests and privileges who see his actions as a threat he is saying that the Soviet Union can have the economic benefits of a more open, competitive society, without its leadership's losing exclusive political control. For the U.S. part, cynicism may not be in order. But caution is.

Contributors to this volume have focused on four central aspects of continuity and change within the Soviet Union: politics, political culture, society, and nationality. Politics continues to command all aspects of life in the Soviet Union. Politics determines Gorbachev's design of *perestroika*, as well as his chance of implementing it. His leadership recognizes that the Soviet Union's current crisis was brought about by the stagnation and destructiveness that the political system imposed upon Soviet society. In Gorbachev's view, radical political change is fundamental to the reforms he sees as necessary to develop a progressive Soviet society. And he is clearly determined to alter the deadening effects the political system he inherited has had on Soviet society.

Gorbachev is opposed, as the pages following will describe, by vested bureaucratic interests buttressed by tradition, inertia, and a fear of political commitment. He must thus pursue several important goals in order to overcome this, including:

- Transforming the Communist Party, almost 20 million strong, into a genuine political movement, as opposed to an appendage of the party bureaucracy
- Reducing that bureaucracy's political power while removing it entirely from the daily management of the urban and rural economy
- Creating checks and balances in the political order by strengthening the national parliament and the governing bodies in the republics, provinces, and cities
- Promoting grass roots pressure against the party bureaucracy, partly through greater freedom of expression

The principal enemies of Gorbachev's reform effort are the "conservatives." His most loyal supporters are the "liberals," represented by many in the creative and technical intelligentsia—such as writers and scientists. To become powerful enough to implement *perestroika*, however, Gorbachev will need the support of the still-uncommitted centrists who are often made uneasy by his liberal supporters. The liberals constantly

test the limits of the new dispensations of freedom and thus provide the conservatives with ammunition to frighten the centrists.

To make *perestroika* work, the General Secretary must find ways of controlling the bureaucracy. He has begun to appoint officials who support his program, particularly in the Central Committee. But it is clear that mere personnel changes will not be enough. Gorbachev needs also to impose structural changes that will curb the bureaucrats' power and force them to act in accord with his program. Such structural changes began only with the June 1988 Nineteenth Party Conference and the Plenum Central Committee that followed. Soon, we will be able to measure their effects in the results of elections to the Party's ruling bodies in November 1988, and to the new Soviet Union National Deputies in November 1989.

Faced with the Soviet Union's pervasive tradition of Russian authoritarianism and Soviet mass conformity, Gorbachev knows that if people are to act differently they must think differently. As in the past, at least the initial impulse for change has come from above. Now we are seeing also an outburst of new ideas from below.

Such new thinking is represented most clearly in the area of political culture—those rules of behavior based in Marxist-Leninist ideology and Russian history and tradition. Changes in this culture will be a valid indicator of just how far Gorbachev has succeeded in stimulating new thinking. Gorbachev and his followers have examined and criticized many of the basic principles of Soviet political culture. Furthermore, many of the more creative members of the intelligentsia have followed this lead and turned the Soviet media into an arena for an intense clash between traditional and new ideas. Here, they question the infallibility of the party and criticize mistakes made recently, as opposed to those made forty years ago. Spontaneity—the dirtiest word in the Bolshevik vocabulary—is tolerated, if not encouraged. Individual creativity and entrepreneurship are praised. And it appears that the open expression of different opinions is no longer a certain one-way ticket to the Gulag.

Despite the fact that many Soviet officials are still reading the old script, recent changes in culture represent a real statement of Gorbachev's intention. Put permanently into practice, they would effect a sea change in Soviet political life.

Gorbachev is clearly seeking a significant transformation in the relationship between the Soviet state and the Soviet society. The society that Gorbachev inherited differs dramatically in some ways from Stalin's: It is younger and better educated and has the world's largest professional and middle classes. But despite such changes, Stalin's successors did not significantly shift the relationship between the Soviet citizen and the state. The interests of social groups and of individuals remained



entirely subordinate to those of the state, as defined by the political oligarchy.

Although Brezhnev continued Khrushchev's moderation of Stalin's brutalities, he left a plundered economy, a parasitic party, and a body politic generally disdainful of the work ethic. Gorbachev wants to change this without fundamentally changing the single-party system that allowed it to happen. It remains to be seen whether he can have one without the other.

Gorbachev appears to sense he can no longer simply decree that things be done, as did Stalin, and that a revolution imposed from above—even a peaceful one—will not work. Gorbachev is not out to crush any class or group but to create conditions that will stimulate and engage everyone's energies in the modernization challenge. The General Secretary hopes he can bring about a new reconciliation between the state and the society—and from that will come stability and progress. But there are limits to what he is offering. Will it be enough? Will he get the burst of participation and creativity he is seeking by offering Soviet society increased responsiveness, but not accountability, from the Party?

The outcome is uncertain. *Perestroika* has already produced many "unintended consequences." Gorbachev, to his probable consternation, and his critics, to their certain satisfaction, are discovering it is difficult to calibrate the parceling out of freedom and critical privileges. Unanticipated social forces can come forth. Indeed, nowhere is this more evident than in the relations with the many nations that compose the USSR. Since the Revolution, the Russians have ruled a multinational imperial system from Moscow. Relations between those nations and the Russians, and among those nations themselves, are extremely sensitive. And the Russians' ability to maintain control over this is fundamental to the present system's stability.

The recent nationalistic turmoil in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and the occupied Baltic states demonstrates that conditions having a direct impact on Gorbachev's chances for success can get out of control. In fact, strained relations between the dominant Russians and the non-Russian peoples constitute probably the single most difficult obstacle to *perestroika's* success. They threaten to foster dangerous, newly awakened, centrifugal tendencies along with the economic and political decentralization that Gorbachev believes necessary for the Soviet Union's revitalization. The question is simple. Can the Russian leadership transform peacefully its present imperial system into a genuine multinational state?

I am particularly interested in the Jewish aspect of the nationality question. Can the Soviets cope with this issue, which is so important both in Soviet terms and in U.S.-Soviet relations? Gorbachev's response to the struggle for the right to emigrate, for the release of all prisoners

of Zion, and for religious and cultural freedom for Jews who wish to remain Soviet citizens will be an important litmus test of the extent of his liberalization.

The prospects are exciting. But serious questions remain. Can Gorbachev succeed with his plans, and are his plans enough?

*Edgar M. Bronfman*  
*President*  
*East-West Forum*

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# 1

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## Ideology and Political Culture

*Archie Brown*<sup>1</sup>

Some of the deepest skepticism in the West concerning the possibility of significant change for the better in the Soviet Union is based on the belief that the ideology of the Soviet state and the political culture of the Soviet elite and of the mass of the people are in essence unchanging. If the Soviet leaders' way of looking at the world stays the same and the fundamental values and beliefs of the elite and the people remain as they were, what hope can there be for either meaningful reform at home or a more constructive relationship with the West?

Thus, the issue of continuity and change in ideology and political culture—although seemingly at some remove from the everyday world of political decisionmaking—is of critical importance for the success or failure of the project on which Mikhail Gorbachev has embarked in the second half of the 1980s. Because the concepts of ideology and political culture can mean different things to different people, it should be made clear what is meant by them here.

Ideology has been defined in so many different ways<sup>2</sup> that some meanings are almost the precise opposite of others. The term *political culture*, although not the subject of quite as many definitions as its parent anthropological concept of *culture*,<sup>3</sup> has also generated argument concerning its scope as well as its utility. What matters is that analytical distinctions be made that will pave the way for useful discussion of the important political phenomena embraced by the concepts.<sup>4</sup>

As far as ideology is concerned, I adopt the definition propounded by Malcolm B. Hamilton in a recent article<sup>5</sup> and hold to my own earlier definition of political culture.<sup>6</sup> Thus, an *ideology* "is a system of collectively held normative and reputedly factual ideas and beliefs and attitudes advocating a particular pattern of social relationships and arrangements, and/or aimed at justifying a particular pattern of conduct, which its proponents seek to promote, realise, pursue, or maintain."<sup>7</sup>

Hamilton supports the idea that ideology takes the form of a system or a relatively coherent pattern of ideas and beliefs not only because that notion appears in almost all previous definitions but also because this is one of the features that can usefully distinguish ideology from ideas and beliefs more generally.<sup>8</sup> A *political culture*, as I see it, "consists of the subjective perception of history and politics, the fundamental beliefs and values, the foci of identification and loyalty, and the political knowledge and expectations which are the product of the specific historical experience of nations and groups."<sup>9</sup>

A majority of the political scientists who have made use of the notion of political culture have adopted a similar "subjective," or psychological, view of the concept. Apparently because it is easier to obtain evidence on the public conduct of citizens of Communist states than on their values and beliefs,<sup>10</sup> a number of specialists on Communist politics have, however, adopted a much broader definition of political culture that includes behavior<sup>11</sup> or even organization.<sup>12</sup> But there is much to be said for defining political culture so stringently that it does not become a virtual synonym for "politics" but rather so that it facilitates discussion of the relationship between the complex of subjective factors—political perceptions, political knowledge, values and beliefs—on the one hand, and political activity and the potential for political change, on the other.<sup>13</sup>

It should be clear from the definitions of ideology and political culture I have adopted that the substance of one can impinge upon and intertwine with the other, notwithstanding some important differences between the two concepts. In the concluding section of this chapter, I shall return briefly to this point, but before then I examine Soviet ideology and political culture in turn, paying attention to the ways in which they may, in fact, have changed or be changing. I shall also consider the relationship of both ideology and political culture to Soviet policy and to the prospects for serious reform of the system.

### Soviet Ideology

The definition I have adopted for ideology is applicable to all ideologies (as distinct from ideas and beliefs more generally, including some of the deep-rooted ones that come within the rubric of political culture). Ideologies, moreover, are to be found in all states, not just Communist ones. But Soviet ideology fits particularly well with this emphasis on a *system* of ideas and beliefs and on advocacy of a particular pattern of social relationships and of political conduct. The Soviet Union has an acknowledged official ideology, Marxism-Leninism, and devotes vast resources to its promotion. While there are many perceptions and fundamental political beliefs of both the elite and the Soviet people that

have little or nothing to do with Marxism-Leninism, they may appropriately be considered under the heading of political culture.

Although there is broad agreement that Marxism-Leninism is an "ideology," the very term *Marxism-Leninism* is far from free of ambiguity. Karl Marx *could* not have used the expression and V. I. Lenin *did* not. The term *Marxism-Leninism* dates from the early Stalin period of Soviet history, and Iosif Stalin himself made his own contribution to the body of doctrine, some elements of which (such as the idea that classes continue in the socialist stage of development of society but that they are "nonantagonistic classes") remain part of the ideology to this day. Marxism-Leninism is both more and less than the sum of all the works of the remarkably prolific Marx and Lenin. It is *more* not only in the sense that subsequent politically authoritative interpreters have added to (or "creatively developed") the arguments of Marx and Lenin, but also inasmuch as the doctrine has been codified into a set of binding rules and principles applicable in contexts often very different from those in which Marx and Lenin wrote. It is *less* in that, for most of the Soviet period, Marxism-Leninism has consisted of a conscious selection from the works of Marx and Lenin by the Soviet political elite, with particular political leaders or theoreticians acquiring great power *over* Marxism-Leninism. Most of what has been produced (especially for mass consumption) is a slimmed-down and simplified Marx and Lenin, in which some parts of their writings are deliberately accorded greater weight than others. This is what has formed the official ideology known as Marxism-Leninism.

The question of the part played by the thought of Marx and Lenin themselves in contributing to the highly authoritarian (or, as some would have it, "totalitarian"<sup>14</sup>) character of the Soviet state is too large to be dealt with here, except in passing. There are strong participatory-democratic (although hardly pluralist-democratic) strands in the thought of Marx and Lenin, especially in their vision of socialism as distinct from the period of struggle against the capitalist state. But as Leszek Kolakowski has observed, "Marxism was a combination of values which proved incompatible for empirical though not for logical reasons, so that some could be realized only at the expense of others."<sup>15</sup>

It could be argued that the absence in Marx and Lenin of a place for the idea of legitimate conflict and political competition was particularly important for later Soviet developments.<sup>16</sup> Although Lenin's *State and Revolution* has been interpreted as an example of the democratic and libertarian side of Lenin's thought, as distinct from the authoritarian *What Is to Be Done?*,<sup>17</sup> A. J. Polan has based an entire book-length condemnation of Leninist authoritarianism on an analysis of *The State and Revolution* and its implications. In Polan's words:

The "libertarian" Lenin bears equal responsibility for the Gulag with the "authoritarian" Lenin. Lenin's theory of the state rigorously outlawed all and any relationships that can make the triumph of the Gulag less likely. In their place, *The State and Revolution* put a concept of the state that already, in August 1917, was monolithic, authoritarian, single-willed and uncheckable.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever may be said about the contribution of Marx and Lenin themselves to Soviet "Marxism-Leninism" and to the character of the Soviet state (there is still ample room for debate on these questions), there can be little doubt of the enormous reinforcement of the most dogmatic strands in the doctrine under Stalin. Indeed, from the early 1930s until Stalin's death, the official Marxism-Leninism that emerged circumscribed all argument and offered a single doctrinaire line on virtually every theoretical issue. It is one of the more encouraging developments of recent times that Mikhail Gorbachev, in his speech to the January 1987 Plenum of the Central Committee, viewed some of the country's problems as stemming from the schematic and dogmatic approach to theory that not only became the norm under Stalin but also, as Gorbachev did not fail to note, left an impact on Soviet Marxism-Leninism and the social sciences that has been felt to the present day.<sup>19</sup>

Gorbachev observed that "the theoretical concepts of socialism" had remained "in many respects at the level of the 1930s-1940s," when the tasks facing society were entirely different from those it faced today. Those were the years in which "vigorous debates and creative ideas disappeared from theory and the social sciences while authoritarian evaluations and opinions became unquestionable truths that could only be commented upon." Furthermore, "the social structure of society was portrayed schematically, as having no contradictions or dynamism deriving from the multifarious interests of its different strata and groups."<sup>20</sup>

Gorbachev also was critical of the ways in which the ideology developed, and failed to develop, in the post-Stalin years. It is worth noting, however, that although Stalin's death did not lead to a return to the vigorous debates within Marxism of the 1920s or to all critical options being open, as long as support for them could be found somewhere in the works of Marx and Lenin, it did become possible for argument within Marxism-Leninism to resume. Nevertheless, in both the Khrushchev and the Brezhnev periods these were generally esoteric debates. Critiques of the status quo that drew support from the writings of Marx and Lenin tended, particularly in the Brezhnev years, to be couched in careful language and confined to the pages of small-circulation academic journals and specialist books.

Yet it is important that political thought as an activity resumed after Stalin's death and was given great impetus by Nikita Khrushchev's so-called secret speech to the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, which detailed many of Stalin's crimes and, by implication, the extent to which the Stalinist version of Marxism-Leninism had become a rationalization of a tyrannical rule. Thus, some of the intellectual groundwork for the reforms Gorbachev is now proposing and for his critique of the condition of the Soviet economy, society, and political system began to be laid in Khrushchev's time and continued even in the apparently (but by no means entirely) barren Brezhnev era.<sup>21</sup> Such creative thinking as persisted during that period was, however, in spite of Leonid Brezhnev's predictions rather than because of them.

### *Ideological Change*

In addition to a cautious resumption of argument within Marxism-Leninism, the post-Stalin years have also, however, been marked by changes in the official ideology—the version of Marxism-Leninism that is given the imprimatur of the highest Party authorities. The changes are of sufficient importance to show how misleading it is to think of Marxism-Leninism as something monolithic and unchanging. Thus, under Khrushchev the view, which originated in a group around Otto Kuusinen (the veteran Finnish Communist who was a senior secretary of the Central Committee), of which the young Fedor Burlatsky (still an active reformer almost thirty years later) was an influential member, took shape that the “dictatorship of the proletariat” had given way to a “state of the whole people.”<sup>22</sup> This notion, far removed from orthodox Marxism, was resisted at first by the official guardians of the ideology, but it appealed to Khrushchev, who liked the idea that he was presiding over a qualitatively new stage of Soviet development. The concept's greatest practical contribution was that it went some way toward recognizing the role of the intelligentsia within the Soviet Union and removing them from a subordinate position in theory, which had sometimes been accompanied by oppression in practice. In the not so distant past, hundreds of thousands of them had been persecuted *not by* the proletariat but by Stalin's security police *in the name of* the “dictatorship of the proletariat.”

Under Khrushchev, too, encouragement was given to the idea that the ultimate stage of Soviet development—the creation of a communist (as distinct from a merely “socialist”) society—was within reach. The 1961 Party Program spoke, in a phrase that was dropped in the Brezhnev years, of the country having entered “the period of full-scale construction of communism.” The process was to be relatively brief, with communism



"in the main" being built during the next two decades (by about 1980). The revised Party Program adopted at the Twenty-seventh Party Congress in 1986 made no such rash prediction, for Khrushchev's venture into futurology had been a considerable source of embarrassment to his successors. As Gorbachev said recently, in an unmistakable reference to that period, "Superficial notions of communism and various prophecies and abstract views gained some currency. This in turn detracted from the historical significance of socialism and weakened the influence of socialist ideology."<sup>23</sup>

In the years of Brezhnev's ascendancy—his power was substantially greater following the Soviet military intervention ending the 1968 Prague Spring and especially after the Twenty-fourth Party Congress in 1971 when he consolidated his position within the leadership by adding four new voting members to the Politburo—the official ideology acquired a more cautious, complacent, and yet somewhat defensive tone. The notion of "developed socialism," which when first launched in the 1960s was deemed to be still in the early stages of construction and embodying ideas of reform, including the use of the profit motive and material interest and "the transformation of the entire superstructure,"<sup>24</sup> degenerated into an apologia for the status quo once it had been through the hands of more orthodox theorists and had been adopted personally by Brezhnev as the name for the stage of development reached during his General Secretaryship. Discussion of the nature and periodization of "developed socialism" became a major scholarly industry under Brezhnev, whereas critiques of the deficiencies of the system and society were discouraged both by conservative holders of power and by the conservatism of the ideological construct that placed such emphasis on how "developed" Soviet society had become—regardless of the lines, shortages, inefficiencies, and injustices that persisted in the real world of the Soviet Union.

The first authoritative, albeit oblique, critique of "developed socialism" came from Yuri Andropov, who emphasized that the Soviet Union was only "at the beginning" of the stage of "developed socialism," which would be a "historically long one" with its "own stages and phases of growth."<sup>25</sup> Gorbachev, in a major speech several months before his accession to the General Secretaryship, in which he first raised many of the reformist themes on which he has elaborated since becoming leader,<sup>26</sup> similarly referred to the task and "problems of *perfecting* developed socialism."<sup>27</sup> Since then, he has abandoned "developed socialism" as a central concept. In his speech to the Twenty-seventh Party Congress, he noted how it had become a cloak for conservatism,<sup>28</sup> and it was doubtless "developed socialism" that, *inter alia*, he had in mind when he spoke to the January 1987 Plenum of the Central Committee