THE SOVIET SYSTEM IN CRISIS

A READER OF WESTERN AND SOVIET VIEW

edited by
Alexander Dallin and
Gail W. Lapidus

Westview Press

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Preface

This book was inspired by a conversation with Frederick Praeger, then publisher of Westview Press, that began with his apparently innocent question about how Soviet specialists taught the contemporary history of the Soviet Union when all standard textbooks had been overtaken by recent events. It was only a short jump from agreement that a collection of new materials was needed to the idea that we should undertake the task of assembling it—testimony to Fred's enthusiasm and powers of persuasion. We are very grateful for all the work and wise counsel of Susan McEachern, Beverly LeSuer, and their staff at Westview Press. As usual, the book's development turned out to be more complicated and time-consuming than we had thought—in part because we were shooting at a moving target.

Our thanks go to all the authors, editors, and publishers of books and journals who gave permission to reproduce the titles included here. Some pieces, mercifully, were in the public domain. Special thanks go to those who updated their papers for this collection and to those journals that seem to have made themselves indispensable by carrying a large number of seminal pieces central to intellectual debates among Sovietologists.

In a number of instances we have been obliged to reproduce only selections from longer articles, papers, or books. This reflects no judgment regarding any shortcomings of these works but merely an awareness of the limitations of available space. Some of the cuts and omissions were indeed painful to make. And—because we do indicate the source from which our text was taken—we would urge all those who would like to consider the fuller, uncut argument and documentation to consult the original text. We would have loved to include a number of other interesting pieces, but there simply was no room. The rule we tended to follow was to make selections in such a way as to give the reader a fair sampling of diverse opinions—both American and Soviet—as well as the more important contributions to the public debate.

Perfectionists will (properly) complain that this book uses several different citation styles and systems of transliteration from Cyrillic to Latin characters. The general rule we followed was to keep the pieces reproduced in this volume as close as possible to the original. As a result readers will find the same person spelled Yeltsin, Eltsin, and Yel'tsin in different articles. Only in the most outrageous cases have we felt free to alter the spelling or citation form used. Likewise, one

consequence of deletions from within certain chapters is the unusual sequence of footnote references, and we can only plead with the reader not to be troubled by having note 14 followed by note 23. These blemishes are regrettable, but (as they used to say in Moscow) what is this compared to the world revolution?

In the process of selecting, assembling, and translating the items reproduced in this volume we were helped by several graduate students at Berkeley and Stanford. We are delighted to express our appreciation for the knowledgeable assistance and dedication of Joseph Brandt, Philip Goldman, Oleg Kharkhordin, Corbin Lyday, Semion Lyandres, Kira Reoutt, Kelly Smith, Amy Weisman, and David Woodruff.

The events in the Soviet Union are as complex as they are fascinating. No single perspective can capture the drama and the promise, the chaos and the collapse. Perhaps this collection can help make them more real—and also convey something of the variety of perspectives with which outsiders observe and analyze the Soviet scene.

Alexander Dallin
Gail W. Lapidus

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Contents

PART 1

Introduction

1

The Setting: An Introduction

ALEXANDER DALLIN
& GAIL W. LAPIDUS

Six years after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power—first, as secretary general of the Communist party, later also as president of the Soviet Union—the dramatic changes in the Soviet system that began in 1985 had been interrupted by a conservative counterattack.[1] Whatever may lie ahead, the winter of 1990–1991 saw a partial reversal of the process of reform that had brought fundamental changes to the USSR.

THE MARKERS OF CHANGE

What were the main characteristics of the intervening years of reform? A first and far-reaching transformation was the institution of ***glasnost***—in substance, a freeing up of access to information, the gradual erosion of censorship, and the progressive elimination of taboos on subjects that had previously been impossible to discuss in the mass media. The abandonment of an obligatory "general line" (and its corollary, that all other lines were wrong and hence impermissible) opened the door to a degree of free discussion unprecedented in Soviet practice at least since the 1920s. Once it was acknowledged that the Party was not the repository of a single mandatory truth, it was possible to encourage a new "pluralism" of opinion, a receptivity to new ideas and the search for new answers, particularly as it became apparent that the old ideology had neither the hold nor the power that its proponents had claimed for it. *Glasnost* created major new opportunities for intellectuals (and unavoidably also to charlatans) to challenge old myths and fill the ideological vacuum. Historians were now able to gather and present the

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evidence on topics that had been taboo, such as the purges of the 1930s, and debate the relationship of Stalin to Lenin or the inevitability of the October Revolution; plays that had long been banned could now be performed; forbidden books could be reprinted; foreign broadcasts were no longer jammed; and a rich array of newspapers and journals representing the whole spectrum of political, ideological, and other concerns made their appearance.

This general erosion of inhibitions and fears under the impact of *glasnost* was accompanied by political democratization, an opening of the political system to diversity, and a degree of responsiveness to rank-and-file grievances and demands. The same years saw the rapid and widespread mushrooming of grassroots organizations—institutionally, the first competition for the Communist party in the hitherto "mono-organizational" society. Some of these networks of "informal" organizations, nominally nonpolitical and sometimes indeed dedicated to local, environmental, social, leisure-time, or other pursuits, proved to be the foundations of social movements from the bottom up. Some later registered as bona fide clubs, associations, and publications, and others became political parties.

The first competitive elections in Soviet history and eventually the Party's abandonment of its monopoly of power encouraged the emergence of numerous rival parties. Importantly, the opportunity to nominate and elect independent candidates undercut the time-honored system of *nomenklatura* by which the center in effect nominated reliable candidates for all jobs, elective and appointive. Although the Communist candidates suffered major setbacks in the elections, the Party remained the single most powerful—and virtually the only nationwide—actor on the Soviet political scene, if only because of its vast network, its access to policymakers, the vested interests of its staff, and the property (such as newspapers and buildings) it controlled across the whole country.

In addition to attempting "democratization," the reformist leadership sought to promote two other changes—a division of power between the executive and the legislative branch, with the Congress of People's Deputies and the smaller Supreme Soviet transformed from rubber stamp into a real, if inexperienced, political actor; and a division of power between the Party and the state, with the unadvertised transfer of functions from the Party secretary general to the new office of president (first of the legislature and later of the country), and a similar transfer of responsibilities from the Politburo to a new Presidential Council. Needless to say, such changes were typically resisted by the losers—in this case, the incumbent Party secretaries and other functionaries of the Party *apparat*. Toward the end of this period, additional institutional changes came with disconcerting frequency and contributed to a sense of instability and jurisdictional uncertainty.

An ambitious agenda was tackled by the new legislature—laws on freedom of the press, freedom of individual conscience, a broad human rights bill, as well as various economic and price reforms, new tax laws, the creation of procedures for a "law-governed state," and congressional oversight of military and security affairs. Even though in practice a combination of inexperience, political foot-dragging, and the control of the agenda "from above" seriously undermined its effectiveness, the new legislature (and its telecast proceedings) was a promising innovation.

Glasnost and democratization had a particularly dramatic impact in the non-Russian republics. The delegitimation of Stalinist policies and practices opened