

The Troubled Birth of Russian Democracy

Parties, Personalities, and Programs



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Michael McFaul
Sergei Markov

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Photo: Meeting in Moscow on March 10, 1991
Manezh Square in the capital became the arena of demonstrators' passions. Called together by the Democratic Russia Movement, tens of thousands of Muscovites came there to express their feelings toward the Union referendum and the coming rise in prices and to support once again the position of the chairman of the Russian Federation of the Supreme Soviet, B. N. Yeltsin.
(Photo credit: D. Sokolov, TASS)

Preface

In 1988, when the Democratic Union was founded, the monopoly of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) over organized political activity had begun to erode. In August 1991 it collapsed. What kaleidoscope of parties, movements, and forces will fill the political vacuum created by the CPSU implosion is still uncertain. Several political parties and movements with distinct ideological platforms and tactics, however, had already begun to emerge before the CPSU's collapse. This book is a snapshot of the spectrum of political forces, movements, and parties that existed in Russia in 1991.¹ Compiled here are interviews, documents, and analyses that provide an introduction to those political forces, ranging from the radical Democratic Russia Movement to the neocommunist United Workers' Front.

This book is not a survey of all political parties, movements, or clubs in Russia.² Rather, we have selected a small group of parties and movements that were the most prominent in Russian politics in 1991.³ As the situation in Russia changes, the people and parties discussed in this book may fade from importance, while other new faces and forces will emerge. In organizing this book, however, we have tried to select those people and parties that played historic roles during the dramatic years leading up to the August coup in 1991.

The rapid pace of change in Russia has frustrated our ability to record, study, and understand the history and development of Russia's democratic (and antidemocratic) movements, arguably one of the most important events of the twentieth century. Although most events discussed in this book occurred during 1989–

1991, they already seem like ancient history. Moreover, many of those events and the personalities who participated in them are still unknown to many in the West, for most previous scholarship on Soviet politics focused on the inner workings of the CPSU Politburo, not the development of informal political activity outside official structures.⁴ The demand on scholars and politicians (both in the West and Russia) to understand the present and future situation in Russia has left little time to retrace and explain the origins of this second Russian revolution.

As such, this book aims to add to the data base about this important period in Russian history. Unless recorded beforehand, political history is always told from the perspective of the winners. Even in the interviews in this book, completed during the spring and fall of 1991, the nuances and perspectives on the historical development of the political parties and movements had already been influenced by Boris Yeltsin's increasing success. Follow-up interviews after the coup demonstrate how a single, contemporary event can radically reshape the way in which we understand the past. Although this book makes no claim to correct for this inevitable recasting of history, we do hope that these interviews and documents from a particular, defined moment in time will help historians and political scientists understand the context and flavor of these revolutionary times on the eve and in the wake of the August 1991 putsch.

With few exceptions, both authors participated in the interviews, all of which were conducted in Russian. Before beginning each interview, we explained that the text would be published in a volume of interviews of political leaders. From each organization, we interviewed the most active and/or prominent political figure, which was not always the official chairman or president of the organization. Given space limitations, all interviews had to be abridged. Michael McFaul translated and edited these interviews; he also wrote chapter 1 and is solely responsible for any errors or omissions in these sections.

In calling this book *The Troubled Birth of Russian Democracy*, we do not assume that Russia's transition to democracy will succeed. As discussed in detail in the following chapters, major obstacles now impede democracy's development, and antidemocratic forces threaten the Russian democratic project altogether. If a democratic system does not take hold in Russia, the historical period discussed in this book—a period in which democratic structures and institutions were emerging—may help illuminate the reasons why.

Acknowledgments

The information for this book was compiled under extremely difficult circumstances. Russia was in the midst of one of its most volatile historical moments, as we were pestering some of the main actors in this drama to sit down with us and recollect where they have come from and where they are going. In addition to those people whose interviews appear in this book, we would like to thank the following people who granted us interviews during an extremely hectic time: Andrei Antonov, Mikhail Astafiev, Vladimir Boxer, Igor Chubais, Maksim Dianov, Vladimir Filin, Telman Gdlyan, Kirill Ignatiev, Boris Kagarlitsky, Valerii Khomyakov, Igor Korovikov, Vera Kriger, Pavel Kudiukin, Vladimir Lunin, Vyacheslav Lyzlov, Anatoly Medvedev, Alexander Obolensky, Alexander Ogorodnikov, Lev Ponomarev, Galina Rakitskaya, Ilya Roitman, Ilya Shablinsky, Lev Shemaev, Vyacheslav Shostakovsky, Alexander Shubin, Dmitrii Shusharin, Yurii Skubko, Mikhail Sobol, Sergei Stupar', Alexander Sungurov, Alexander Terekhov, Anatoly Zheludkov, and Victor Zolotarev. If this book could have been a thousand pages long, all these interviews would have been included.

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Final production of this book took place when we had assumed other responsibilities and affiliations. For indirectly supporting this project, and being patient with both Sergei and me as we ducked away to finish editing this book when we should have been doing other things, we would like to thank the International Research and Exchanges Board, the Center for International Security and Arms Control, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and the “MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour” team in Moscow.

*We wish to thank especially Lina Markova and Donna Norton
for allowing this book to happen.*

*In preparing this book, we were away from our respective homes
in Dubna/Moscow and San Francisco for more time than we should have been.
For understanding the importance of historical moments, even when they
interfere with the more important parts of life such as family and friends,
we dedicate this book to them.*

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The Origins of Party Formation in Revolutionary Russia 1985–1992¹

Self-organized political associations, be they political parties, civic groups, trade unions, or parliamentary factions, constitute a central component of a democratic system.² For most of the Soviet Union's seventy-year history, self-organized political association was either suppressed, co-opted, or impeded. As the "leading and guiding force of Soviet society, the nucleus of its political system," the Communist Party of the Soviet Union ordered and controlled almost all political activity in the state and society.³ Organized forms of dissent in the Soviet Union⁴ have a long history, however, ranging from overt antigovernment actions such as the demonstration on Red Square in 1968 protesting the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia to more subtle forms of informal organization such as football fan clubs or Russian cultural associations.⁵ But whenever dissent groups attempted to organize overt, independent political associations, they were quickly stopped by the Soviet regime. Within the Party-state apparatus, some Western observers who identified political interest groups, lobbies, and factions concluded that the Soviet system was becoming more pluralistic.⁶ Yet characterizing splits within the Politburo or interministerial battles as indicators of Soviet democracy only rationalized repression and obfuscated oppression in a regime that actively quashed independent association and, more generally, civil society.

Gorbachev's Reforms from above Ignite Sparks from Below

On becoming general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev began to temper the Party-state monopoly on the Soviet polity and economy. After twenty years of *zastoi* (stagnation) under Leonid Brezhnev, revitalizing the system required radical action, not minor adjustments.⁷ After a year of tinkering with the old tactics of *uskorenie* (acceleration) and discipline, Gorbachev began to respond innovatively to the Soviet crisis with policies like *glasnost'*, *perestroika*, and *demokratizatsiya*. Gorbachev's agenda, however, aspired to create neither a democratic political system nor a capitalist economy. Gorbachev's liberalization of political processes aimed to stimulate a restructuring of the Soviet socialist system.⁸ *Glasnost'* and democratization were means for stimulating *perestroika*, not ends in themselves.⁹ In prompting grass roots political activity with these liberalizing policies, Gorbachev hoped to create an alliance for change between reformers at the top of the Party and "the people" from below against the entrenched Party bureaucrats who opposed reform.¹⁰

By reforming the ancien régime, however, Gorbachev unleashed revolutionary forces ultimately bent on destroying the old order.¹¹ After decades of repression, independent political associations flourished in the late 1980s, first as clubs, then as fronts and movements, and ultimately as independent political parties.¹² Initially these groups in Russia were devoid of any obvious political content, focusing instead on cultural renewal, urban remodeling, environmental issues, or scientific questions.¹³ Gradually, however, politicized committees or factions crystallized within these apolitical organizations.¹⁴ When politicized members from these informal social groups began to interact with one another, overt political associations coalesced.

Properestroika Clubs

Informal¹⁵ political associations first formed in the spring of 1987, after the plenary session of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union amended Articles 70 and 190 of the criminal code dealing with anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda. Taking their cue from Gorbachev's call for a more open political dialogue, young leaders of the intelligentsia—academicians from institutes, journalists, and low-ranking communist functionaries—convened political discussion groups, including, most notably, the Club of Social Initiative (KSI), Club *Perestroika* (in Moscow and Leningrad), Democratic *Perestroika*, *Perestroika* 88, *Obshchina* (Commune), *Grazhdanskoe Dostoinstvo* (Civic Dignity), and the All-Union So-