TRANSFORMATION AND DEGENERATION: THE CPSU UNDER REFORM

Mark R. Beissinger
University of Wisconsin

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NOTE

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The CPSU today is an organization in crisis. Like other communist parties throughout the world, it is confronted with a declining economy, mounting social problems, institutional paralysis, mass disaffection, protest, and even revolt. Undoubtedly, some will be tempted to proclaim that the party has reached the proverbial historical trash-heap that they believe is its inevitable end. Certainly, given the enormity of the crimes of Stalin, the policy failures of the Khrushchev period, and the massive corruption of the "era of stagnation," all of which are now publicly acknowledged by the CPSU, it is unlikely that there are many today who believe that the party constitutes "the mind, honor, and conscience of our epoch," as it was long claimed for it.

Yet, the transformation that the CPSU is experiencing are as extensive as the crises that it confronts. In a compressed period of approximately three years, the CPSU underwent ideological, institutional, and personnel changes far more significant than those it experienced in any previous period of its history, with the possible exception of the 1930s. Party reform (that is, the remaking of the institutions and practices of the CPSU) is only one dimension of the changes that have engulfed Soviet society in recent years. Actually, it was the
last of the dimensions of reform upon which Gorbachev embarked. Gorbachev's embrace of radical economic reform can be dated from the summer of 1985 and was codified two years later at the June 1987 Central Committee Plenum. His turn towards greater openness in the media and towards a toleration of dissent in Soviet society first appeared in the fall of 1986, and was broadened to include "democratization" at the January 1987 Plenum, at which time the need for political reform was supported in principle. The shift toward party reform is a more recent phenomenon, one that was first raised by Gorbachev at the January 1987 Plenum, but which is associated primarily with the Nineteenth Party Conference of June 1988 and the sweeping changes in the operations of party and governmental institutions that it introduced. As Gorbachev expressed the new line of thinking at a Central Committee conference in November 1987: "It is the party that bears responsibility for the development of the process of democratization. But if it is to be capable of expressing the requirements of the new stage, it must itself undergo change."2

Glasnost' and perestroika are reason enough to rethink the traditional roles and functions of the CPSU, as well as its relationship with society and the futures it confronts. The key debate among Western Sovietologists in the Brezhnev era was that of transformation versus degeneration: whether the institutions of the party were adapting enough to meet the challenges that Soviet society presented, and whether, in adapting to those
challenges, the political system was liberalizing. The original participants in this debate conceived of transformation and degeneration as mutually exclusive categories and universally viewed the engine of change as modernization. Degeneration (sometimes referred to as petrification) was connected with a growing bureaucratic ossification within the party, and transformation with the emergence of a pluralism among bureaucratic institutions and actors, presided over and integrated by the party.

Most participants in these debates would today recognize that elements of both degeneration and transformation took place during the Brezhnev era—i.e., the Soviet political system grew both more pluralized and more ossified. Indeed, there may well have been a connection between these two processes: pluralism and rigidity are universal (and in some circumstances, mutually reinforcing) conditions of bureaucratic organization, and it was the bureaucratization of party life that characterized the Brezhnev administration above all.

The transformation versus degeneration controversy is still relevant today. But glasnost' and democratization have exploded the traditional dimensions and categories of the debate. Soviet leaders have rejected both the bureaucratization of party life and an institutional pluralism presided over by the party. Under glasnost', degeneration has instead come to be associated with nothing less than political instability and threats to the rule
of the party, while transformation has come to mean the creation of a one-party democracy, whatever that means in practice. The circle of relevant participants in politics has expanded, and the engine of change is no longer modernization, but democratization. Soviet leaders have embraced the need to transform their political system, including the roles and functions of the party. But although transformation has reinvigorated institutions, it has also furthered processes of degeneration, as protest and intergroup conflict grow increasingly frequent.

Obviously, Gorbachev would like to transform without degenerating, or more properly put, to minimize processes of degeneration while maximizing processes of transformation. But precisely because transformation and degeneration involve similar processes, achieving one without the other is a difficult feat in politics. Both processes assume a breakdown of existing institutional roles and behaviors. The main difference between them lies in the ways in which human energies are channeled once existing roles and behaviors have been broken down—i.e., whether they are mediated within the official institutional framework, or whether this occurs through alternative channels. What constitutes a transformation rather than a degeneration is often in the eye of the beholder. For many Soviet political figures today, system transformation signifies nothing short of the creation of a multi-party system and the partial dismemberment of the country. For Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership, such
developments would be tantamount to system degeneration. The survival of the party's monopoly over the state is a basic assumption of the sponsors of perestroika, perhaps even its ultimate purpose. As Gorbachev stated the party's continued claim to monopoly over the party system in November 1988:

Only the party, with its authority and possibilities, is capable of performing a unifying role and integrating diverse, sometime contradictory, social interests into a single policy. Only the party, which has regained the character of a leading revolutionary force and is constantly confirming its right to march in the vanguard of society, can guarantee the advance of our country to new frontiers of progress.

For Gorbachev it is the party, not the party system, which must be transformed, and that transformation is central to the entire success of Gorbachev's project.

Any attempt to understand party reform must inevitably begin with a close examination of the party's activities in the pre-Gorbachev period. Glasnost' and perestroika emerged out of the ranks of the party. As much as Soviet reform has given rise to a burst of autonomous political activity from below, reform began as reform from above, as a means of regaining a lost social and economic dynamics and of recapturing the loyalties of a spiritually exhausted society. Soviet reform was rooted in a complex interaction between party and society, an interaction that largely took place during the "era of stagnation." As Gorbachev recently revealed, 110 reports by various groups of experts and cultural figures were submitted to the party long
before Gorbachev came to power in March 1985, and these, along with Gorbachev's numerous meetings with experts and cultural figures, subsequently formed the basis of Gorbachev's initial policies of perestroika.

It is the merit of this book that, much like contemporary Soviet reformers, its contributors have understood the need to re-examine the activities of the party and traditional conceptions of its roles. Given the rapid pace of change in the Soviet Union, any study of the CPSU, particularly one dealing with how its institutions operate and with public perceptions of its roles, runs the risk of having an historical value only. Yet, to understand processes of reform in the Soviet Union today, it is necessary to take stock of the baseline from which change is occurring, to examine how problems inherent in established roles gave rise to efforts at reform, and to identify the dilemmas involved in trying to alter them. The task of any reformer is to break down established institutional roles and structures while simultaneously creating new, more effective ones. In doing so, he will find that the past weighs heavily on the present.

Party Reform in Light of the Findings

With the exception of Merle Fainsod's classic on the Smolensk party organization, most studies of the functions and institutions of the CPSU have been based on official accounts
published in the Soviet press, either by Soviet journalists or by party officials. While these studies have provided us with our basic understanding of the operations of the party, they have several distinct limitations. Articles by Soviet journalists and officials on party activities usually have a prescriptive rather than a descriptive character. Studies based on such sources are necessarily impressionistic; they depend on what editors, censors, and authors prefer to present, and often lack the systematic character to which social science research aspires. Studies based on Soviet press accounts tend to concentrate on the middle and upper levels of the party hierarchy, where press information is richer and more easily aggregated. In general, they are less capable of delving into the subjective side of the party's roles—the perceptions and attitudes of those involved in decision-making, of those affected by decisions, and of those who are on the sidelines watching.

To a large extent, the approach adopted in this book was meant as an alternative to press-based accounts of the party. There are, of course, some very troubling problems in trying to glean information about the party from emigrant sources. The potential biases of those who have chosen to leave society in reporting on their activities in their former society are compounded by American immigration law, which prohibits immigration by communist party members. The ethnic background of informants (mainly Jewish) also raises questions about the extent
to which the perceptions and attitudes reported in this study do indeed reflect those of Soviet society at large. A number of the authors in this book have attempted to limit the impact of such biases to the extent possible, either by confining their questioning to technical matters, or by controlling subjective judgments by background characteristics. Nevertheless, the methodology employed here must be understood as a surrogate for true behavioral and attitudinal research on the party. The extent of its biases will only be revealed when glasnost' has reached the point where Western social scientists can freely conduct similar research inside the USSR.

The questions raised in this book largely deal with three aspects of CPSU activities during the Brezhnev era: 1) The scope and mechanisms of party intervention and control; 2) the logic and functionality of party intervention; and 3) public perceptions of the party's institutions and roles. In each of these areas, the authors present important findings that are useful in understanding party reform.

Scope and Mechanisms of Party Control

As the essays in this book reveal, the scope of activity of the CPSU throughout the period under study was enormous. The party was the premier political institution in nearly all fields of endeavor, and generalizing about the party's role in such varied fields as law, literature, industry, agriculture, construction, finance, and statistics can be accomplished only
with caution. A number of patterns in the scope and limits of party intervention do emerge.

Generally speaking, the more economic the field of activity, the greater the degree of direct intervention by the party apparatus. This is reflected in the concentration of essays in this volume on the economic tasks of the party, a subject which has attracted frequent study by Sovietologists. Paul Gregory notes the extent to which local party apparatchiki have traditionally been viewed as economic workers. He paints a portrait of the local party apparatus as having an impressive array of powers over local industry, constantly intervening to bolster plan fulfillment. Gregory's interviews reveal a role for the local party apparatus in industrial affairs that is considerably larger than that described in earlier works. On the eve of Gorbachev's reforms, the local party organization played a key role not only in obtaining supplies for local enterprises and in lobbying for resources, but also in controlling local balances of funds, redistributing labor resources, and obtaining necessary wage funds. Little wonder, then, that under Gorbachev economic reform has involved major organizational changes within the party, since the party has been as much an economic institution as a political one.

Party intervention in the economy contrasts sharply with the party's activities in the judicial system, as portrayed by Peter Solomon. Supervision over the legal system has traditionally
been accomplished less through frequent intervention than through an informal network of dependencies between legal officials and the local party bureaucracy. Legal decision-making has been controlled through a supervision of people rather than a supervision of cases. The instruments of control have been informal rather than formal: control over jobs, apartments, and access to special stores. Party intervention in specific criminal prosecutions occurs regularly, but infrequently. A similar situation appears to have prevailed in literature, as described by John Garrard. As Solomon observes, in non-economic fields the degree of staffing of a particular department within the party apparatus has not necessarily corresponded with the ability of that department to perform its control functions, since the mode of party supervision has differed radically from that in industry, construction, or agriculture. The obvious implication of these findings is that reform of the party's role in non-economic fields requires more than simply changing the formal powers of decision makers; the system of privileges that local party leaders have at their command and the informal dependencies that the nomenklatura system generates must be attacked as well if judges, journalists, and writers are to free themselves of excessive party tutelage over their activities.

Second, the more specialized and intellectual the activity, the less direct and overt local party intervention. Previous Western research on the party found that the degree of party
intervention traditionally has been higher in agriculture and construction than in industry, where specialized technology and personnel are concentrated and the tasks more complex. Paul Gregory's interviews with former Soviet officials confirm this pattern. Expertise imposes limits on political intervention, or at least imposes costs. Party intervention has been least direct in areas of complex intellectual activity, such as scientific research, and most direct in areas involving little expertise, such as agriculture, particularly in less developed areas of the country. By implication, reform in unskilled and underdeveloped sectors of Soviet society would more likely tread upon entrenched powers of the party apparatus than reform in complex and developed areas of society; opposition to reform might be expected to be more likely among party officials associated with less developed sectors of society than among party officials associated with more developed sectors of society.

Third, the degree of party supervision and intervention has varied enormously according to the level in the party hierarchy. The essays in this volume present a stark contrast between the roles of the party apparatus at the middle levels (the local party apparatus) and its roles at the lower levels (the primary party organization). Supervision of the activities of non-party organizations is a task primarily associated with the middle levels of the party apparatus, in particular the local party apparatus; lower-level party officials are not equipped with the
power to engage successfully in this type of intervention and supervision. Leonid Khotin's finding that the power of the primary party secretary was incomparably less than that of the factory manager is not surprising, and supports the traditional thinking on the subject. It has long been known that the primary party secretary's power is largely confined to conducting political campaigns and strengthening discipline in the workplace, that local party committees do not welcome complaints by primary party secretaries against managers who are successfully fulfilling the plan, and that in many cases factory directors actually select their own primary party secretaries. What is novel about Khotin's discussion are the factors he identifies as causing the dependence of the primary party secretary on the manager. Traditionally, these have been thought to be linked with the primary party secretary's career prospects. Khotin found that not only was the primary party secretary's career dependent on the factory director, but so was his income; primary party secretaries often receive bonuses for plan fulfillment drawn from the regional party apparatus' budget and distributed by the enterprise. Another factor identified by Khotin that limits the primary party secretary's ability to influence plant decision-making is his lack of expertise. Most previous studies identified the primary party secretary as having nearly identical technical qualifications to those of factory directors; the post of primary party secretary was frequently
thought of as a steppingstone towards gaining the factory directorship. But according to Khotin's findings, the technical qualifications of primary party secretaries may be considerable lower than previously thought.

If party intervention is a phenomenon largely associated with the middle levels of the party apparatus, then changing the behavior of this level of the party bureaucracy would be critical for any effort to reform Soviet society. One hears frequent references in the Soviet Union today to footdragging on the part of local party apparatus in implementing Gorbachev's reforms. Many observers believe that it is precisely these officials who constitute the chief threat to Gorbachev's power. By contrast, if the behavior of primary party secretaries is largely dependent on the heads of the institutions in which they work, one would expect that under conditions of reform, as in the past, this level would be most vulnerable to cooptation from below.

Finally, the pattern of organization of both party and governmental institutions has strongly influenced the scope of party intervention. When central ministries have been strong, the power of the local party apparatus to intervene in decision-making has been constrained. As Paul Gregory points out, in this situation the local party apparatus has been forced to approach central ministries as a supplicant. When central ministries have been weak, as under Khrushchev's sovnarkhoz reforms, then the power of the local party apparatus to intervene in decision-
making has been enhanced. Similarly, the power of the local party apparatus to intervene in decision-making in organizations subjugated to republican ministries has been greater than its ability to intervene in organizations subordinate to all-union ministries. And as Merle Fainsod observed long ago, the organization of the party apparatus along branch lines (the dominant principle from 1949 to 1988) has tended to accelerate party intervention in the economy. 11

The natural antipathy between the central bureaucracy and the party apparatus was a major factor fueling support within the party apparatus for Andropov's, and subsequently Gorbachev's, crackdowns on central ministries and attacks upon bureaucracy. And the connection between party intervention in the economy and a branch organization of the party apparatus was very much in Gorbachev's mind in conducting the September 1988 reorganization of the party apparatus; it essentially rid the party apparatus of most branch departments in an effort to pull the party out of operational economic decision-making. Yet, if previous patterns of party intervention are any guide, not all of Gorbachev's reforms point in the direction of a loosening of party control over economic affairs. The inauguration of regional self-accounting in the Soviet Union, much like Khrushchev's sovnarkhoz reforms, could very well strengthen, rather than weaken, the influence of local party officials over local economies, particularly in the area of fiscal policy.
The Logic and Functionality of Party Intervention

The logic of party intervention is an issue closely connected with the functionality of party intervention, and ultimately with the need to reform the activities of the party apparatus. Why do party officials intervene in local decision-making? Does party intervention have a positive impact on production and on the achievement of the party's goals in general? While these questions have received considerable attention in these essays, no single answer emerged.

Some authors provide evidence that party intervention has been functional to the achievement of regime goals in politics and the economy. The criteria by which local party leaders are judged by their superiors ensures their attention to particular political and economic tasks within their regions. Paul Gregory finds that "former members of the Soviet economic bureaucracy take it for granted that local party officials are held responsible for local results." Similarly, Peter Solomon observes that at least half of the interventions by the local party apparatus in the conduct of criminal cases that he documented served valid political purposes "that could justify them in the eyes of top politicians" -- in particular, protecting those who violated the law in pursuit of the plan and those whose prosecution would tarnish the party's image. Under conditions of economic reform the criteria by which the performance of party
officials are judged might be expected to change, influencing the
types of interventions that would occur. From this
perspective, reform would affect the character and frequency of
party intervention in the economy, but not the fact of party
intervention, which, given the centrality of economic tasks for
the party, is functional to the system.

Quite a different pattern appears in the legal system.
Peter Solomon raises the important point that party intervention
has tended to lower the self-esteem of legal professionals and to
undermine public belief in the system of justice. In the
Gorbachev era, party leaders have come to realize that the loss
of legitimacy that accompanies party intervention in the court
system hurts the corporate interests of the party far more than
the scandal that accompanies the prosecution of high-level party
officials. Party intervention in the legal system to protect
party officials is no longer considered the corporate interest of
the party. In fact, under the constitutional amendments passed
in December 1988, the courts have the right to strike down any
party decision that runs counter to the law, a right which has
yet to be exercised.

A second point of view notes the rather large number of
instances in which party intervention has taken place in
opposition to the logic of regime goals. In particular, two
processes within the party apparatus tend to cause such
interventions: the personalization of power and goal
displacement. Solomon, for instance, shows that local party secretaries intervene in criminal cases in many instances for their own personal ends. Stephen Shenfield also describes how local party officials at times use statistics as a weapon in their local political struggles by ordering local statistical offices to manufacture evidence of report-padding (pripiska) against opponents. The dependence of local TsSU officials on local party organization provides ample room for the flourishing of family circles and corrupt patron-client networks at the local level that seriously pervert the goals of the center. The personalization of power within the party apparatus has always existed, as Merle Fainsod's study of Smolensk made clear. It reached enormous proportions in the late Brezhnev period and became a major issue in post-Brezhnev politics.

Party intervention can also contradict regime goals as a result of goal displacement within the party apparatus, as tasks imposed from above intersect with the interests of organizational actors below. Solomon, for instance, describes how local party intervention in criminal prosecutions at times takes place in pursuit of local institutional goals that are at variance with the goals of superiors. Shenfield observes how local party bodies demand to view and approve locally-collected statistical information before it is sent to higher levels, lest it reflect negatively on their own work. In such cases, the logic of the way in which officials are judged by their superiors causes...
officials to behave in ways that ultimately contradict their superiors' goals. Goal displacement occurs within the party apparatus because it is a bureaucracy. No matter how hard-hitting campaigns for discipline and against corruption might be, party intervention will always contain certain dysfunctions. The task party leaders face, short of abolishing the apparatus, is to create mechanisms to minimize the likelihood of these problems occurring and to expose and correct them when they arise. Soviet reformers have chosen to pursue both paths, involving not only a major shake-up inside the police and legal establishments, but also innovations inside the party, such as the introduction of periodic certification (аттестатиив) of party employees.

A third view emerges from the work of Susan Linz, who presents the picture of party apparatus that is largely detached from the workings of industry, intervening infrequently and irregularly, and having only a marginal impact on affairs when it does (a view that contrasts sharply with that presented by Paul Gregory). She provides a novel view from below, from the microeconomic point of view of the factory rather than the macroeconomic point of view of the local or all-union party apparatus. It may well be that the party apparatus is deluged from morning until night with requests to aid enterprises in finding supplies (as most Soviet press descriptions of the local party apparatus recount), even to the point where it can perform
few of its other duties, yet at the same time have only a
marginal impact on affairs, simply because of the enormity of the
economic problems it faces. Linz suggests that the degree to
which the party has played a functional role in social and
economic affairs has been overstated, and that little would
change in industry were the party's supervising role eliminated.
Rather than being functional or dysfunctional, the party
apparatus emerges from this view as largely irrelevant.

Linz's point is an interesting one, and economic reform is
itself an admission that party intervention never succeeded in
substituting for the market. But to use Charles Lindblom's
analogy, to argue that the party apparatus is incapable of
playing the role of fingers should not lead us to believe that it
is incapable of playing the role of thumb. The party apparatus
was never supposed to act as a full-blown alternative to the
marketplace; successive Soviet leaderships have repeatedly
condemned such behavior, viewing it as podmena, or substitution
for the authority of state organs. Rather, the operational tasks
of the party in the economy have been to pick up the slack that
other alternatives to marketplace proved incapable of handling.
The failure of the party apparatus to have a significant impact
on affairs in the factory is due to the magnitude of the failures
of the planning system, not to the incapacities of the party
bureaucracy. Soviet reformers would like to construct an
economic system in which the party apparatus attempted to play
the role of neither fingers nor thumbs and in which it was largely irrelevant for the day-to-day operations of the economy. Contrary to the established wisdom, Linz suggests that the withdrawal of the party from operational economic tasks may actually be easier to achieve than it might seem at first appearance.

Public Perceptions of Party Activities

The Soviet system was experiencing a profound crisis of legitimacy during the period encompassed by this study, and that crisis played the major role in fueling political and economic reform in the post-Brezhnev period. Donna Bahry and Brian Silver note that during the late Brezhnev era only the KGB received lower ratings from respondents than the party in terms of the honesty and integrity of officials. The public perceived the competence of local party officials as the lowest among institutions rated, while the Politburo was ranked in the lower-middle range. Respondents reported more satisfaction from their contacts with other organizations than from their contacts with the party. And party officials were viewed as careerists; in the popular mind the main incentive for joining the party was the attainment of career opportunities and material privileges.

Bahry and Silver go beyond a simple description of the Soviet system's crisis of legitimacy; they attempt to establish the factors that explain differing evaluations of the party within the population. Women judged the party more kindly than
men, and the more educated believed the party less honest than those with less education. They suggest that young, educated males are more likely to be attracted to a reform-minded party leadership than other groups, and in fact this has been the main base of support that Gorbachev has sought to tap. More intriguing is the finding that material satisfaction, support for regime norms, and perceptions of one’s primary party secretary are significantly related to how a person judges the competency and honesty of party officials. By implication, a Soviet leader courting popular support should seek to improve his legitimacy by providing higher levels of consumer satisfaction, manipulating regime norms, and improving public perceptions of the party at the grassroots level. This is precisely what Gorbachev has attempted to do. A major shift in economic priorities has taken place, with emphasis placed on food and consumer goods as opposed to defense and heavy industry, though so far this has not translated into a higher standard of living. Similarly, through glasnost, Gorbachev has radically redefined regime norms in such a way as to narrow the legitimacy gap that his predecessors bequeathed to him and to gain a measure of genuine popular support.

Finally, Gorbachev has attempted to remake the party at the grassroots level. Much attention has been focused by Sovietologists on the massive turnovers that have taken place within the Soviet leadership and elite in recent years. But the
changes in personnel have been massive at the bottom of the party hierarchy as well. Simply during the party's 1988 report-and-election campaign, a third of all primary party secretaries in the Ukraine and 40 percent of all primary party secretaries in Latvia were replaced. Perhaps more important, the institutional mechanisms linking the primary party secretary with the party rank-and-file and the non-party population have been altered. Competitive elections are being used to fill lower-level party posts; whereas previously the primary party secretary was mainly dependent on the will of the factory director, competitive elections make the primary party secretary dependent on public opinion in the collective. The revised party rules approved by the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress in February 1986 established a new procedure for recruiting party members. New members can be admitted at open party meetings, where non-party personnel can express their views on the qualifications of candidates.

Paradoxically, though these reforms were intended to reinvigorate party institutions at the grassroots level, they may in fact be causing their degeneration. By making the primary party secretary and the party rank-and-file accountable to public opinion, the discipline that serves as the backbone of authority in any Leninist party is undone and social division penetrate the party from below. The resulting pluralization of the party places a new burden on party institutions to act as integrators.
of social conflict, not least of all within the party itself.

Party Reform and Soviet Society

Given the traditional roles of the party described in this book, it would have been impossible to reform any aspect of Soviet society without at the same time reforming the activities of the party. Party reform in the Soviet Union did not precede reform in other areas of Soviet society; it has been the byproduct of those reforms, a part of their inherent logic. The goal of Soviet reform—both in the economy and in politics—has been the creation of a new system of authority, one based not on hierarchy, but on the autonomous interplay of self-interested actors and their effective integration within the dominant institutional framework. Such a drastic change in authority relations assumes a massive transformation in the entire purpose and functioning of the party. As V.A. Medvedev, Central Committee Secretary, redefined "the unique role of the Leninist party," it is "to integrate the goals of various groups of the population, to alleviate misunderstanding and disagreement, to put forward general all-union (obshchenarodnye) interests over personal interests, and to actively conduct the search for an all-union consensus."15

According to this conception, "command-administrative methods" are to eschewed in favor of so-called "political methods" of leadership; consensus-building is to take priority
over bureaucratic discipline; and the party’s monopoly position within the party system is to be guaranteed no longer by its ability to control, but by its ability to resolve conflict. Party actions are to take place within the framework of the law. Many of these ideas remain at the level of intentions rather than accomplishments. There have been no attempts to prosecute party officials for violation of the law, and the tendency of local party officials to order (nakażat’) rather than consult expert and public opinion is reported to be widespread, either out of social inertia, confusion about new roles, or, more rarely, conscious sabotage. But what is significant is the fact that the party is attempting to grope its way towards a new role for itself in Soviet society, to transform itself from a party of control to a party of social integration. A new conception of the party has been laid out and is being acted upon; it has yet to be realized.

This new conception of the party, however, places the traditional notion of the vanguard party under strain. While interest aggregation and adjudication are not entirely new tasks within the CPSU, the range and scope of these activities in the past was relatively restricted compared with the freewheeling pluralism that glasnost’ has unleashed. A vanguard party, based as it is on discipline, is not equipped to act as a vehicle for compromise among autonomous and self-interested actors, and were it to be such, it would undoubtedly lose its vanguard quality.
At a Central Committee conference in November 1987, Gorbachev spoke of the need for the CPSU to "rethink somewhat its role as the political vanguard of society." Nevertheless, the CPSU today still officially proclaims itself "the leading and guiding force" of Soviet society. The party has incongruously attempted to retain its vanguard status at the same time as attempting to transform itself into an institution for the integration of spontaneously-generated societal interests (or in Leninist terms, to combine the strictest discipline with the broadest democratism). Trotsky long ago noted this inherent contradiction in democratic centralism. Others appear to be raising much the same point today. As Leonid Abalkin, one of Gorbachev's economic advisors, boldly stated the issue at the Nineteenth Party Conference in June 1988: "Can we, while retaining the Soviet organization of society and a one-party system, ensure a democratic organization of political life?" Both liberal Soviet intellectuals desiring a multi-party system and conservative party apparatchiki seeking to restore discipline within the party are united in answering this question in the negative; they differ only in their preferred outcomes.

No matter how the party might attempt to preserve its vanguard role, events have, to some extent, overtaken the party. Throughout much of the country the party has silently abdicated its "leading and guiding role" to the approximately 60 thousand "informal" (i.e., unofficial) groups that have arisen over the
past several years. By eroding the monopoly position of official institutions, glasnost' and democratization have created what Eisenstadt called "free-floating political resources" in Soviet society. For the first time in Soviet history, the party finds itself in a position in which it must compete for the political loyalties of the population. The party faces the prospect of either recapturing those loyalties, or seeing them captured by other social forces. As one Latvian party leader has observed, "when we do nothing, 'informal groups' take over, put forward their own solutions, and everything becomes more protracted and more difficult to settle." 

In many parts of the country, the party has been losing the competition. A.P. Klautsen, first secretary of Riga gorkom, noted that some communists have begun to conclude that "since the Nineteenth Party Conference the party has gone underground," being led by the various popular fronts that have arisen around the country and paralyzed by deep splits within its ranks along national lines. Though the party has been the initiator of perestroika, the public perception is that the party itself is the major obstacle to its realization. When respondents to a survey in Tadzhikistan were asked, "In your view, what is holding back perestroika?" seventy percent answered "the passivity of communists." The stunning defeats suffered by many party officials (some of whom ran unopposed in the March 1989 elections for the Congress of People's Deputies were an indication of the
depths to which the party's legitimacy has sunk within many sectors of the population.

Revelations about the misdeeds of the past that fill the press everyday have had a demoralizing effect upon many party members, particularly older ones. In Tadzhikistan, for instance, the number of party members quitting the party, turning in their party cards, increased markedly from 1986 to 1989; 2.2 percent of party members in Tadzhikistan voluntarily left the party in three years. As one newspaper article explained, "in recent years even a new term has been born among party personnel--the term 'refuseniks' (otkazniki)"--to describe "those who renounce party membership and submit their resignation." S.K. Chapaev, a 56-year-old worker and 19-year party member who submitted his resignation from the party, explained his decision in the following way: "What I believed all my life has become dust ... Nothing sacred is left ... My entire life has been crossed out and has turned out to have been for nothing." An Estonian party official reported: "It happens, for instance, that a communist of thirty years standing announces that he is leaving the party. 'Why?' I ask. 'I don't see the sense of it any longer,' he replies, and that ends the conversation." 

Ironically, the leaderships of alternative political movements--the national fronts--have emerged to a significant degree from the rank-and-file of the party. In Estonia, almost half of the 106 members of the leadership of the Estonian
National Front are party members. In Latvia, about 30 percent of the participants in the founding congress of the Latvian Popular Front were communists, whereas over half of the delegates to the founding conference of Interfront, the movement organized to protect the rights of non-Latvians in Latvia, were party members. Thus, even among those who remain party members, there has been a good deal of defection of loyalties towards alternative political centers. Moreover, the party itself is plagued with serious splits along ideological and national lines; a party that can house both a Ligachev and a Yeltsin under a single roof inevitably loses something in the consistency of its positions.

Bahry and Silver found career opportunities and material privileges the most important attraction of party membership in Soviet society; they argue that any attempt to eliminate those privileges would lead to a decline in the number of people desiring party membership. Newly-published figures on party membership in the fall of 1988 indicate that the number of new recruits to the party fell by 27 percent over the previous fifteen months. As the Russian writer Valentin Rasputin, himself not a party member, explained:

(In the past) being a party member was profitable, and therefore it lost its authority .... Now to be a party member has become unprofitable, even dangerous, and departure from the party in such a moment .... (derives from) the same reasoning that led people into the party previously.28

While Gorbachev has to some extent closed special stores and
attacked the material privileges attached to party membership, one suspects that public opinion has been far more potent in discouraging new recruits than any lack of party perquisites. The steepest declines in party membership have been recorded in Estonia and Armenia, suggesting that a strong negative relationship may exist between the level of party recruitment and the vitality of alternative mass movements. Similarly, the types of people entering the party appear to have changed under glasnost', with the number of blue-collar workers, women, and komsomol members joining the party dropping sharply. Again, the extent to which these changes are connected with attacks on the material privileges of party members is unclear, and a question that deserves further study. Ideological considerations may be important as well. Bahry and Silver, for instance, suggest that women and those lacking education are least likely to be attracted to a reformist leadership, and given that fact it is hardly surprising that declining levels of entry into the party occurred among females and workers. The introduction of competitive elections within the party and state hierarchies has had a clear, deteriorating effect on the organizational cohesiveness and discipline of the party. Electoral competition inevitable focuses the attentions of candidates to demands from below, not to the discipline emanating from organizational superiors. The first secretary of Kiev obkom has noted the conflicting demands placed on party officials now forced to
compete for public approval at the polls.

Some communists who are candidates for deputies have fought for great popularity without regard for the party's charter, party discipline, or party ethics... to be a member of the party and simultaneously to pour dirt upon it is, from any point of view, amoral, unprincipled, and, to put it politely, dishonorable.\(^\text{30}\)

In some parts of the country, notably Lithuania and Estonia, the local party organization has been effectively captured by local public opinion, such that party officials view their role as representatives of the public rather than members of a disciplined Leninist party. In other areas of the country, local party officials have threatened to resign their posts rather than run in local elections, where they are likely to face defeat at the hands of the public.

Glasnost' and democratization have led to an atrophy in the traditional instruments by which the party has sustained its vanguard status in society over the previous seventy years. The logic behind the party's departure from operational economic tasks was to allow it to concentrate its attention on general policy-making, ideology, and personnel functions. But drastic changes have taken place in these spheres as well. New forces have been mobilized into the politics, complicating the policy-making process. Today, Soviet decision-makers must reckon with the prospect of mass protest against their decisions, open criticism by journalists and newspaper editors, and independent-minded legislators who refuse to rubber-stamp the policy choices.
handed to them by the apparatus. In some respects the focus of policy-making has shifted from the party to the Supreme Soviet, where party candidates for high-ranking positions have been rejected with astounding frequency. With glasnost', the notion of the ideological unity of society has lost all meaning; indeed, ideology itself has all meaning, being blamed by many for the abuses and shortcomings of the past. The nomenklatura still exists, but its size has shrunk,31 and more emphasis is being placed on work with the reserve, so that the party might nominate several candidates for a particular post. But party candidates recommended from above for nomenklatura posts have often been flatly rejected by their institutions. In fact, candidates not recommended by the party appear to have an advantage in competitive elections over those recommended by the party. The size of the party apparatus has been reduced at the local level by as much as 25 to 30 percent,32 and many long-time party apparatchiki have found themselves prematurely retired or sent down to posts in lower-level institutions. Most important perhaps is that centralism itself has become a dirty word in the party. It is touted as a primary cause for the Soviet Union's economic failures and history of political despotism.

The perception that the CPSU's vanguard status has degenerated under glasnost' is widespread within the party. As the first secretary of the Dnepropetrovsk obkom recently observed:
One must look the truth in the eye: the prestige of the party has fallen as a result of extended self-flagellation and excessive slandering of its reputation. The flow of fresh forces (into the party), especially those of young people, has dropped. Party discipline and the responsibility of members of the CPSU for fulfilling the charter and program of the party have been lowered.

Transformation and degeneration have been concomitant processes of political change under Gorbachev, not competing processes. Although the party has not yet abdicated its vanguard status, its capacity to act as a vanguard has eroded; at the same time as there has been an attempt (not yet complete) to transform the party into an arena for integrating autonomous social forces. Unfortunately for the party, the conditions that make for a successful vanguard party undermine those necessary for pluralist social integration, and vice versa. If the party is to perform any of these roles properly, it will eventually have to choose among them -- a decision which it so far has refused to make.

The Party and the Future

How the party makes this choice is hardly predetermined. One possibility would be for the party to relinquish its monopoly over the party system. Political reform in Poland and Hungary quickly generated pressures for the transformation of the party systems of those countries. Some of these same pressures have arisen in the Soviet case and were expressed during the 1989 electoral campaign for the Congress of People's Deputies. The
embryos of alternative political parties have already formed in the Soviet Union. But what differentiates the Soviet case from those of Poland and Hungary is that, with the exception of the Democratic Union (a collection of former dissidents who have already declared themselves an opposition party with a pan-national and liberal platform), nearly all the other potential political competitors to the CPSU are ethnically-based groups: the various national fronts and nationalist movements that have emerged in the non-Russian republics and the RSFSR. This suggests that transformation of the party system in the Soviet Union would have a disintegrative effect upon the political system as a whole. The survival of the Soviet Union in its current territorial configuration may well necessitate one-party rule.

A second possibility would be for the party to fail in its efforts to act as a social integrator, leading to a movement within the party to restore its vanguard character. The degree of pluralism unleashed by glasnost' could exceed the capacity of the newly-remade institutions of the party to manage conflict, leading to political instability. In many respects, this is the situation in which the party has found itself in the past several years. The longer this situation continues, the greater the potential for a reversal of party reform. A number of Western observers believe that any attempt to engage in fundamental transformation of the Soviet political system will inevitable
elude the CPSU's control and challenge its monopoly over the party system, leading to a conservative backlash, a reversal of reform, and a restoration of discipline inside the party. There have been a few rumblings in this direction. In 1989, the deputy head of the Moldavian republican party's department of administrative organs was expelled from the party for his close ties to unofficial movements in the republic, and an investigation began in the Central Committee to explore whether Boris Yeltsin had violated party discipline and should be stripped of party membership. But so far these are rare and exceptional events; divisions within society have penetrated the party to such a degree that were the party to attempt to restore discipline among its ranks in earnest, a massive purge would be necessary, with many in high positions themselves being targets. Such a move would isolate the party from society at a time when citizens have already learned to assert themselves politically—a dangerous and unstable situation by any standard of political analysis.

A third path would be the continued degeneration of the party's vanguard capacity and the transformation of the party into a loose (but nevertheless, monopolistic) political association—a kind of collective constitutional monarchy that no longer leads and guides society, but functions as a political forum for all who seek to lead and guide society. The transformation of the party into an umbrella organization for
various factions in society would be the logical outcome of Gorbachev's efforts to make the party an instrument for social integration among autonomous social forces. Before the party would reach that point, party reform far beyond what has been enacted would be necessary, including a revision of Lenin's 1921 ban on factions. But the new vision of the party's purpose is not without its problems. By acting as a forum for social integration in society, the party would be duplicating the function of state organs once again -- this time legislative organs rather than administrative ones.

Past research on the CPSU concentrated on the forms of party control and intervention in society and their degree of functionality, as reflected in the investigations in this book. Perestroika raises new questions about these traditional instruments of control, and in some senses provides the ultimate test for the question of functionality. Will the party's operational intervention in the economy cease entirely, or will it retain some role for itself in a reformed economy? If the latter is true, will this new role be functional or dysfunctional to economic performance? And how will new patterns of organization in the economy -- enterprise khozrashchet, territorial khozrashchet, and cooperatives -- affect the operations of the party? Will the party be able to maintain its influence and control over institutions that have been given financial and organizational independence? Can traditional
instruments of control, such as the nomenklatura, operate successfully under new political conditions? Will the circular flow of power that every General Secretary has used to build a power base still be valid under conditions of competitive elections, and if not, what instruments will be available to leaders in the struggle over power and influence? There is even some question as to how one judges what constitutes party intervention under reform. If a party official simultaneously occupies the position of chairman of a local Soviet, or the members of the Supreme Soviet are overwhelmingly party members, does this constitute party intervention of some sort? Since the purpose of perestroika is to change the behavior of institutions and institutional members, it presents a wealth of material for those exploring the logic of Soviet institutions.

But perestroika also poses questions for the CPSU that are radically different than those explored in any previous Western research. First, future researchers are less likely to focus on the question of the functionality of party intervention than on the ability of the party leadership to curb what it already judged to be dysfunctional behavior by the party bureaucracy. Can, for instance, the party's operative role in the economy be successfully eliminated, even if it is judged dysfunctional by the party leadership? Second, given that one of the objects of reform has been to eliminate excessive party controls over society, explaining the differential impact of declining party
intervention on the ways in which institutions and social actors behave will be a fruitful avenue of research. There has been a great deal of variation in the degree to which institutions and social groups have taken advantage of the opportunities that reform has afforded them. Explaining these differing patterns of behavior raises interesting questions that cut at the heart of the nature of change in the communist world.

Third, future research on the CPSU is likely to concentrate on institutions that have largely been ignored in previous Western research. The Supreme Soviet, for instance, received relatively little attention in the past, since it served a purely symbolic function. Now that the activities of the Supreme Soviet have been imbued with substance, the party's relationship to the legislature has become a central issue in the policy process. Similarly, the CPSU's elective organs have been called upon to play a key role in integrating disparate points of view within the party. In the past, Western research assigned these institutions a secondary importance to the party apparatus in governing the country. This was hardly surprising; Soviet authors now openly recognize that the traditional dominance of the party's executive organs over its elective organs has been a problem throughout Soviet history. One of the aims of reform is to restore the primacy of the party's elective organs. In the future, Sovietologists undoubtedly will want to probe the extent to which the party's elective organs have been able to gain
control over the party apparatus, the ways in which these two institutions interact, and the extent to which elective organs perform their mission as the fora for social integration in an increasingly plural society.

Finally, Western researchers need to devote considerable attention in the future to the ways in which party and society interact and the ability of the party to maintain its internal cohesion under conditions of political pluralism. As the circle of relevant participants in Soviet politics widens, the objects of Western research should broaden as well. Will the party recapture the political loyalties of the population, or see them captured by other social and political groups? How does the party regulate its relations with "informal" groups? What influence do these groups exert on the policy-making process? And under what circumstances is the party willing to grant them "formal" status? To what extent are the social divisions within society penetrating into the party? And to paraphrase Abalkin, can the party survive in a system in which there is openness and a degree of political competition? The answers to these questions, above all others, will determine the party's future, and ultimately the future of the Soviet Union.
NOTES

1. The phrase, long used to describe the party, appeared in the 1961 CPSU Program. See KPSS v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh s'ezdev, konferentsiakh plenumov TSK, vol. 10 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1986), p. 180. Significantly, the phrase was dropped from the new party program approved at the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress in February 1986.


6. See, for instance, Gorbachev's statements in Pravda, March 27, 1989, p. 1. In this respect, Soviet reformers differ from Hungarian and Polish reformers, who have moved to legalize alternative political parties and have raised the possibility that the party itself might abdicate power.


12. Indeed, published Soviet statistics by region now emphasize the delivery of contracted supplies as the main indicator by which to judge a region's performance. The val often is no longer even reported.

13. It is striking the degree that, at least in respect to consumption policy, Bahr's and Silver's findings parallel those of Valerie Bunce, who argued that new leaders tend to pump investment to areas that are likely to win popular support, like consumption and welfare, to build their legitimacy. See Valerie Bunce, *Do New Leaders Make a Difference? Executive Succession and Public Policy under Capitalism and Socialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 224-225.


23. Ibid., p. 2.


31. In 1988 the number of positions on the nomenklatura of Zhitomir obkom was cut in half, from over 1100 positions to 572. Pravda Ukrainy, May 12, 1989, p. 2.

32. See, for instance, Kommunist Tadzhikistana, January 28, 1989, p. 3.


35. Izvestiia, April 20, 1989, p. 3.

36. The possibility that the type of violent crackdown that occurred against proponents of political reform in China in June 1989 might take place in the Soviet Union seems remote. Unlike the Soviet leadership, China's leadership never embraced political reform, only social and economic reform. By contrast, the Soviet Union has experienced radical political reforms without yet experiencing social and economic change. And with the exception of Chinese students, China's population has not been demobilized out of existing political roles, nor have political loyalties been effectively captured by alternative groups. In other words, the price that the Soviet Union would have to pay for a reversal of reform would be considerably higher than the rather stiff price that China has already paid.
