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Robert G. Kaiser

GORBACHEV: TRIUMPH AND FAILURE

In just over five years, Mikhail Gorbachev transformed the world. He turned his own country upside down. He woke a sleeping giant, the people of the Soviet Union, and gave them freedoms they had never dreamed of. He also gave them back their own horrific history, which his predecessors had hidden and distorted for sixty years. He tossed away the Soviet empire in eastern Europe with no more than a fare-thee-well. He ended the Cold War that had dominated world politics and consumed the wealth of nations for nearly half a century. Then he discovered that he had started a revolution he could not control—a discovery that led to chaos and tragedy. These are the most astounding historical developments that any of us are likely to experience.

Many of these changes were the fruit of Gorbachev's personal endeavors. Others were more logical than they may have seemed as they were happening. Gorbachev was often working with the forces of history, not against them. The West has not always grasped the uncertain nature of Soviet history. It tended to see a monolithic, totalitarian power, hell-bent on world domination; for many years, it also saw a Soviet Union that seemed to be advancing that goal relentlessly. Those were flawed images. One of the most important reasons why Gorbachev was possible was that the Soviet system never worked as well as advertised. By the time he was a candidate for national leadership, it was stumbling badly. His prescriptions for radical change were acceptable to many of his countrymen because they understood their country had fallen into a disastrous state.

Ultimately Gorbachev may enjoy the historical status of a transitional leader—one who bridged two eras by keeping a foot in both. It is clear that Gorbachev's ability to maintain a sort of split personality as both Party man and revolutionary was what enabled him to shatter the Stalinist system. If there

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had not been two Gorbachevs, there would have been no Gorbachev of the kind we will now remember. But Gorbachev's inability to renounce his roots in the Party limited his freedom of action and, eventually, his capacity to manage the forces that his revolution unleashed. Because he was a good Party man he succeeded; because he was a good Party man he failed. That may prove to be the ultimate paradox of Gorbachev.

The events of early 1991 in Lithuania and Latvia allow for a new and more complete set of answers to basic questions about Gorbachev the man and Gorbachev the reformist leader. They are discouraging answers, especially for those in the Soviet Union and around the world who had allowed themselves to romanticize this man. He turned out to be something less than noble, something more recognizably Soviet and communist and political.

Mikhail Gorbachev's historical reputation will depend largely now on how far the violence goes—on how willing he proves to be to reverse his own civilizing reforms. It seems likely that the positive contributions for which he will be remembered have all been made. Moreover he has assured himself a large place in history, and a large part of his reputation will be positive, despite his ultimate failures.

II

If the formation of character cannot be divined, the character itself is not so mysterious. Gorbachev's character is formidable and has made him stronger than those around him in Soviet politics. He has intimidated and impressed everyone who has worked near him. Boris Yeltsin, his great rival, admitted this in his autobiography:

What he has achieved will, of course, go down in the history of mankind. I do not like high-sounding phrases, yet everything that Gorbachev has initiated deserves such praise. He could have gone on just as Brezhnev and Chernenko did before him . . . draped himself with orders and medals; the people would have hymned him in verse and song, which is always enjoyable. Yet Gorbachev chose to go another way. He started by climbing a mountain whose summit is not even visible. It is somewhere up in the clouds and no one knows how the ascent will end: Will we all be swept away by an avalanche or will this Everest be conquered?

Gorbachev saw firsthand many of the most important dramas of the Stalin years. He joined the crowds who mourned

Stalin, and then joined the intense student conversations that Stalin's death had suddenly made possible. As an official in the Young Communist League (Komsomol), he participated in the excitement initiated by Khrushchev's secret speech to the 20th Party Congress in 1956, and was a delegate to the 22nd Congress where Khrushchev put his assessment of Stalin's crimes on the public record. These were experiences Gorbachev shared with countless of his contemporaries—the so-called children of the 20th Congress.

Westerners cannot easily appreciate the way Stalinist mythology overpowered Gorbachev's generation. It successfully defined reality for millions of Soviet citizens, including many who considered themselves free-thinking and cynical but who still could not escape the world view inculcated by official propaganda from kindergarten onward. The myths became a kind of political and intellectual straitjacket, limiting the freedom of movement of several generations of Soviet leaders. Gorbachev broke out of the straitjacket. The experiences of his life, which taught him from an early age that propaganda could be misleading, also enabled him to make this critical break with the conventional thinking of his time and caste—the caste of the Communist Party officials.

Gorbachev cannot be understood apart from his membership in that caste. He grew up in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; he is a Party man, instantly recognizable as such by other Party men. The Russians use the word *partinost*, roughly translatable as "partyness," to signify qualities connected with the Party. Gorbachev has always had it. Just as Richard Nixon's conservative credentials enabled him to open relations with China, so Gorbachev's *partinost* allowed him to go so far toward destroying the Soviet Communist Party. Other Party men saw him as "one of ours," and initially they accepted his prescriptions as necessary to preserve the Party's leading role.

Over the years Gorbachev's initial optimism that he could take the Party with him in a new direction was replaced by frustration, even outright hostility. He could be seen losing patience beginning with the Central Committee plenum of January 1987, when he first introduced the idea of significant political reforms. The Party apparat blocked the decisions taken then, and it blocked the economic reforms approved at the plenum of June 1987. Another important turn came during the preparations for the 19th Party Conference in June

1988. The theses for that meeting outlined a new kind of Soviet state in which the Communist Party would have a clearly secondary role. Some of the Party elders became openly hostile to Gorbachev, and there was no sign of greater cooperation from the apparat. Then at the 28th Party Congress in July 1990, Gorbachev pushed through reforms that removed the Party from a direct role in running the country.

III

Through all of this, Gorbachev never hinted at a loss of faith in communism. But he did redefine it. In April 1990 he gave a remarkable speech to a Party gathering called to celebrate Lenin's 120th birthday. He used the occasion to consummate a process he had begun earlier of repositioning Lenin in official hagiography, converting him into an ardent ally of perestroika. "We have to look back to the sources of our Great Revolution," he said, "to realize what kind of society emerged from it, and why we need another revolution of no less importance." The society that emerged was a distortion of Leninist ideas: Lenin died too soon to prevent this. The cause was "taken up by Stalin, which spelled disaster for the Party, society and socialism. Over a short period of time, the Party was actually turned into a tool of the administration-and-command system, with all the far-reaching consequences that can still be felt today." Lenin would be on the side of a new revolution, Gorbachev suggested, because he was always the first to entertain new ideas and policies when new conditions revealed a need for them.

A month later, in May 1990, *Time* magazine asked Gorbachev, "What does it mean to be a communist today, and what will it mean in years to come?" His answer was intriguing:

To be a communist, as I see it, means not to be afraid of what is new, to reject obedience to any dogma, to think independently, to submit one's thoughts and plans of action to the test of morality and, through political action, to help working people realize their hopes and aspirations and live up to their abilities. I believe that to be a communist today means first of all to be consistently democratic and to put universal human values above everything else. . . . The Stalinist model of socialism should not be confused with true socialist theory. As we dismantle the Stalinist system, we are not retreating from socialism, but are moving toward it.

In those few sentences Gorbachev appeared to reject (or simply ignore) virtually everything the West had previously

associated with Soviet communism. He embraced a flexible, moralistic and humane outlook that could have come from the mouth of an American Unitarian. Yet when his own moment of truth came in Lithuania, Gorbachev could not fulfill his new definition of a communist. Instead he reverted to an earlier type.

He continued to call himself a "convinced communist" and a socialist even after he had embraced economic reforms that looked more like capitalism than socialism. "Socialism . . . is entrenched among the people," he said at the end of November 1990, "and I don't think it is necessary to destroy it, as some are trying to do."

"Yes," he went on, "we have bid farewell to the past—an agonizing process." He rejected "the barracks-like mentality of Stalinism" but he would not "renounce my grandfather and what he did. This would mean rejecting generations and what they did. Well then, did they live in vain?" In other words, if we had to admit that the whole Bolshevik experiment was a terrible mistake, we would have nothing to live for. That, I think, is what Gorbachev believes: don't take away the very essence of our cause, lest we have nothing at all.

Here, perhaps, is a clue to the flaw in Gorbachev's character that threatens to turn his revolution from a great crusade into something horrific. In the end he perceived his very identity as part of a continuum that began with Lenin. Two sentences of his April 1990 speech on Lenin are striking: "It is high time we put an end to the absurd idolization of Lenin," he said, then added: "But we condemn wholeheartedly the desecration of his memory, whatever form it takes." Don't make Lenin a golden idol, but revere him! It was a thin line to tread.

IV

Gorbachev's insistence on trying to preserve his communism ultimately undermined his position in the country. Relatively few of his countrymen shared his concern with redeeming Lenin's revolution—they wanted something to eat, some sign of progress toward a normal society and normal lives.

Although Gorbachev held on to his communist identity, he was overhauling Soviet communism to create a better Soviet Union and better communism. But communism held no appeal for large numbers of people, and the union itself held no appeal for many, probably most, of the non-Russian citizens of the U.S.S.R.

Yet there has been much more to Gorbachev's revolution than an effort to preserve communism and the Soviet Union. At certain moments there was nobility, even morality. I am convinced that Gorbachev is, in some way difficult to define, a man of faith. Part is his secular political belief in Lenin's revolution, but Gorbachev has hinted at religious faith too.

The idea that Gorbachev is a believer is certainly beguiling; I hasten to add there is no concrete evidence to support it. A member of the Congress of People's Deputies who worked closely with Andrei Sakharov and who has come to know Gorbachev, suggested the novel theory that a shared religiosity bound those two men together—not so much a conventional religion, but a faith that “history and life have a purpose.” Sakharov's moral strength grew out of his conviction that men were obliged to treat each other humanely. One could argue that Gorbachev was striving—at least until late 1990—for a similar moral authority in his renunciation of the use of force and his more tolerant attitude toward virtually everyone.

In January 1987 Gorbachev had announced that democracy was as necessary to society as air. But in July 1990 at the Party Congress, he reformulated that metaphor. “Spiritual rebirth is as essential to society as oxygen,” he declared.

None of this proves that Gorbachev is actually religious; nor does his admission that his grandmother baptized him. But I am convinced he has had serious moral concerns, that he is interested in spiritual values and that he feels he is serving a larger purpose than most politicians. I do not think he could have taken on the challenges he did without some measure of faith.

v

It is a large jump from questions of belief to matters of tactics, but Gorbachev cannot be understood without an appreciation of his great gifts as a political tactician. His deftness during moments of crisis has sometimes been breathtaking—for example, when he used the young German Mathias Rust's landing of an airplane in Red Square to sweep away the upper echelon of his reactionary military establishment; or when he turned the Chernobyl nuclear accident into a reason for more aggressive glasnost; or his decision to undermine his critics in the Central Committee by publishing their reactionary criticisms of him. Those earlier examples of deftness made the crudeness of his tactics in early 1991 all the more striking.

Generations of future historians will argue over the degree to which Gorbachev was a modern Machiavelli, who knew from the start what he hoped to achieve, but never revealed a card in his hand until he absolutely had to. To my mind this is the wrong way to think of him. As he conducted his revolution, he improvised, reacted. Yes, he did set off with a body of ideas about what needed to change. They were contained in a speech before he came to power. But there was no blueprint; there were just guiding principles.

"In 1985 we all came to the conclusion that one could not live that way," Gorbachev said in a reflective speech in November 1990. "We began looking for an answer, for a new way to live. A concept came into being for the country and the world. Speaking of internal affairs we called it *perestroika*, and we put forward a simple formula: more democracy, more *glasnost*, more humanity. Everything must be developed so that the individual in this society feels like a human being. That is a simple formula. We used exactly the sort of language that people would understand."

"He didn't have a plan," observed Evgeny Velikhov, the Soviet scientist, "but he did have a direction. And he was willing to experiment." Sergei Stankevich, the deputy mayor of Moscow, put it like this: "Gorbachev is not a man who has one set of ideas, one vision. He carries lots of ideas in his head, and if conditions push him, he'll take up one of them."

Similarly Gorbachev the revolutionary could take a break and pass the baton to Gorbachev the apparatchik, who would then behave like a reliable Party man in some situation or other, and pass the baton back to the revolutionary. He switched between the two roles as he saw fit—usually infuriating those who sympathized with whichever role he had just given up. His recurrent incarnations as a Party man led to hesitation and delay, often to the exasperation of reformers waiting for him to recommence his revolutionary crusade. In the first five years these interludes of retrenchment probably smoothed the way for further change. Gorbachev could not have bulled ahead stubbornly without any pause or hesitation; the system could not have tolerated the strain of such incessant movement.

The ability to change his mind made Gorbachev a better tactician. In the case of Yeltsin alone, Gorbachev changed his mind four or five times. In early 1986 he could speak harshly of Sakharov as a criminal; at the end of the same year he could

make the dramatic phone call to Gorky that led to Sakharov's release from internal exile and eventual transformation into Gorbachev's political ally. One month the idea of a multiparty political system was "rubbish"; the next month he was urging the repeal of Article 6 of the constitution to open the way for a multiparty system. He was such a good tactician that many of his liberal supporters refused to believe, in the final months of 1990, that he was abandoning them. Instead they perceived another feint to the right in preparation for a more definitive move to the left. The blood spilled in Lithuania ended that optimism and led to bitter denunciations of Gorbachev by old allies.

At the heart of Gorbachev's tactics was the idea that he should always be somewhere in the middle. The Soviet historian Yuri Afanasyev described him in May 1990 as "a vector politician" who constantly looked for the median position between left and right. For years he cast himself as a wise and moderate leader who could thread a path between "conservatives" unprepared for change and "ultraleftists" who wanted to "skip stages" and jump ahead too quickly. Sometimes this effort to plant himself in the middle was transparently preposterous, but it often worked. He did maneuver the Party out of direct power.

Eventually the center all but disappeared. The new democratic forces drew many of those who long stood with Gorbachev in the center to the left; the deterioration of conditions in the country and the rise of nationalism drew others to the right. For five years after he came to power Gorbachev was a liberal reformer; in the sixth year he found himself on the right, a reactionary trying to stem the tides that his own reforms had created.

This was ironic as well as tragic. For years Gorbachev had argued—and seemed to believe—that democratization was the key to success. When old comrades complained that democracy resulted in the wholesale defeat of traditional communism at the polls, Gorbachev rebuked them. We wanted to give the people a voice, he said—this is why we began our reforms. But when the popular voice turned against him personally, and when democracy threatened the survival of the union, Gorbachev changed his stripes.

VI

From 1985 onward Gorbachev was hobbled by his own shortcomings. One was his inability to choose the right aides and associates, a serious disability for a political revolutionary

trying to push a giant nation in a new direction. Apart from Alexander Yakovlev and Eduard Shevardnadze, Gorbachev never found reliable, resourceful peers who could help him achieve his goals. In the end he even fell out with those two friends. He made many bad appointments and never built a staff of younger associates. Nor did he establish close working relationships with the new political figures his reforms had spotlighted, people like Stankevich and Gavril Popov in Moscow and Anatoli Sobchak in Leningrad. He stuck to Party apparatchiks with a loyalty that exasperated his liberal intellectual supporters.

Was this tactics, or genuine preference? Probably the latter. Gorbachev never seemed comfortable with unconventional people who might be in his intellectual class—he preferred good Party men. But his preference suited his tactics: Party men would have been alarmed if Gorbachev had suddenly embraced a retinue of liberal intellectuals with no Party background.

One reason why Gorbachev did not reach out for more talented associates may have been his excessive confidence in himself. At the outset Gorbachev seemed overconfident in his ability to carry the Party apparatus with him as he initiated reforms. Perhaps the most egregious example of his overconfidence was his failure to confront the need to create a new system to replace the one he was so successfully destroying. Gorbachev seemed to convince himself that he could postpone this task for three years, then four, then five. In the sixth year his procrastination caught up with him.

Gorbachev's first years were such a great triumph at home and abroad that when the country began to turn against him late in 1989 (angered initially by disappearing food supplies and deteriorating economic conditions), he could not adjust. In 1990, when it became clear that the Soviet Union was in real danger of disintegrating, Gorbachev allowed himself to become one of the very people he spent his first five years struggling against—a stubborn office-holder determined above all to retain power. By late 1990 it was obvious that love of power for its own sake was motivating Gorbachev, which is not surprising. This was a man who invested 23 years as a Party functionary in Stavropol to get his shot at power in Moscow. Power was important to him long before democratization was.

His inclination to take offense is another weakness. It

aggravated his relations with many who ought to have been close allies, helping to create a real schism among the liberal intellectuals. Gorbachev never seemed comfortable with the new people created by his own policies—the aggressive liberals who actually believed in democracy, and acted accordingly.

VII

Two of the chinks in Gorbachev's armor have been substantive areas that the Soviet leader could not master: nationalities issues, as the Russians call them, and economics. They are two of the most important matters he faced, and he had a tin ear for both.

In his second speech to the 28th Party Congress he admitted his ignorance about the true state of relations among the many national groups of the Soviet Union, and accused his comrades of sharing it. "All of us—go on, admit it—honestly believed that all of this [ethnic strife] had been happily resolved," Gorbachev said. "For the most part it was toasts to the friendship of peoples at the tables of meetings and at Party gatherings. That's what our work in the area of nationalities policy amounted to. And suddenly we saw it all revealed, and the problems that faced us. . . . Nor did we immediately reach a correct assessment and understanding."

One might dismiss that confession as disingenuous; perhaps it was. It required a certain obtuseness to miss the hostility that Lithuanians and Latvians feel toward Russians, for example, or to disregard the hatred dividing Azerbaijanis and Armenians. But it is possible that Gorbachev's ideological blinders—or wishful thinking—had led him to overlook the evidence and believe the propaganda about a harmonious multinational Soviet state. This was one of the strongest myths that he had grown up with.

Whatever the explanation, the consequences of Gorbachev's obtuseness are obvious. Only after five years in power did he really begin to come to grips with the ethnic divisions that would make it so difficult to preserve the Soviet Union. Ironically the problem became vastly less soluble as a consequence of Gorbachev's reforms. Once Latvians, Ukrainians, Moldavians, Armenians and all the others felt free to speak their minds, organize politically and express their aspirations, the days of the old union were numbered. The logic of glasnost and democratization led inexorably to stronger nationalist sentiment, and from there to separatism. But Gor-

bachev refused to accept that logic. Indeed, he abandoned his own finest principles to contradict logic and hold the country together by force.

Gorbachev's economic incompetence was also serious. It led to his failure to make early progress in reforming the economy. In the first five years his only real accomplishment was the launching of a private, or cooperative, sector of the economy, which began at once to fill in some of the many holes in the state-run system. In many other sectors there was no progress, only deterioration.

From his first months in office Gorbachev convinced the economists who advised him that he had no grasp of their subject, and no confident sense of where to lead the country. Several of those economists have confided privately to colleagues that in the early phases Gorbachev just could not understand the seriousness of the economic situation or come to terms with the pain that real reform might inflict.

The general secretary's uncertainty was clearly reflected in the contradictory initiatives undertaken as *perestroika* unfolded—unraveled might be a better word in this context. Gorbachev did seem to believe the system needed less central control and more autonomy for localities and enterprises. Ostensibly these were the objectives of his reforms. But the most important of them, designed to make every enterprise "self-financing," was hopelessly compromised by a system of fixed prices that hid real values. Hence, "cost accounting"—the subject of many slogans—was meaningless. When the self-financing system introduced at the beginning of 1988 began to falter, Premier Nikolai Ryzhkov, with Gorbachev's support, issued numerous new decrees revoking key elements of the independence that had been promised. By the end of 1989 the economy had been effectively recentralized.

At the end of 1990 I asked Abel Aganbegyan, one of Gorbachev's economic advisors, why the economic situation was so bad. I expected him to say that the problems inherited from the past had turned out to be worse than he and the other reformers realized—in other words, an evasive answer. Not at all. Gorbachev's economic policies had been on the wrong track since the Central Committee plenum of June 1987, he said. The budget deficit had ballooned from three percent of gross domestic product (the Soviet equivalent of gross national product) in 1987 to ten percent in 1989, and higher still in 1990. The money that had to be printed to cover

these deficits had dramatically aggravated inflationary pressures, he said. The anti-drinking campaign went out of control when prices for vodka were doubled, stimulating both an enormous black market and the disappearance of sugar, which home brewers used to make their own white lightning. The government had to spend 25 billion rubles to cope with the sugar crisis, Aganbegyan said. Then after the coal miners' strike of July 1989, wages started to rise at a terrifying rate, although workers' productivity fell. This generated more inflationary pressure. And the government's only response to all this, according to Aganbegyan, was to debate and discuss alternative reform plans.

The dark realm of economics brought Gorbachev face to face with the true consequences of Stalinist rule. This is where much of the worst damage had been done. The Soviet economy had grown according to arbitrary planners' preferences, so it was hopelessly out of balance. The men and women who ran it had no experience with independent decision-making or basic notions such as profit maximization. In a system where prices did not reflect values, the whole idea of profit was confused. Left to its own devices, the economy would more likely collapse than thrive.

Gorbachev eventually had to confront the fact that the conventional tools he had relied on for more than five years to improve economic performance were ineffectual. Managers who did not want to be responsible for the fate of their enterprises simply refused to take responsibility. Bureaucrats in Moscow who did not want to give up their power over individual enterprises found ways to hold on to it. Incentives could not be found to induce farms to grow more food or factories to produce more goods. Higher wages provided no tangible benefits, largely because there were so many extra rubles in circulation chasing too few consumer goods. The entire mechanism had devoured its lubricants and was locked.

Gorbachev's inability to brag of any positive economic results was disastrous for his standing in the country. This failure to produce goods that people wanted to eat and buy was also an incentive to the old guard reactionaries who felt defeated by the first five years of Gorbachev's rule. They revived themselves in the sixth year when they realized that they could discredit all Gorbachev's liberalizing reforms by blaming them for food shortages and worsening economic conditions.

Ultimately the facts of Soviet life—objective reality, as a Marxist might put it—were Gorbachev's greatest enemy. He could open up the Soviet Union, restore its history, initiate debate on fundamental issues, even convert a nation of sheep-like followers into a vibrant new political organism, but he could not overcome the fundamental terms of existence in his country. So, after nearly six years, he had succeeded brilliantly, but also failed. He had thrown off the yoke of Stalinism, an astounding accomplishment; but even without the yoke the country was crippled by the consequences of the past.

Gorbachev's failures are not surprising. Consider what he proposed to do: take a huge multinational empire that had been created by force and coercion; give it a large measure of democracy, while loosening all the traditional bonds that held it together—thus encouraging the rebirth of long-suppressed local nationalisms; allow its citizens to travel quite freely around the world, but at home fail to give them attractive consumer goods, food, housing and so on—fail worse and worse, while proclaiming the benefits of your reforms; do all this in a backward land whose citizens have little training and less experience useful for building a democratic society of self-reliant citizens, a country whose economic infrastructure is collapsing. This is obviously no formula for success. It may actually be a formula for disaster.

Disaster could come in many ways. Economic collapse and famine are conceivable. Many of the 15 republics may try to go their own ways, creating chaos or civil war. Ethnic warfare could become commonplace. Ironically, Shevardnadze had warned in April 1990: "If perestroika fails, dictatorship is possible. However much we brush aside such a forecast, history does not allow us to forget it." Eight months later he was on the podium of the Congress of People's Deputies, shocking them with the announcement of his resignation and warning again of dictatorship, this time more directly. History, which he had invoked in April, was moving much faster than even he had foreseen. History—it hovers over the entire amazing enterprise, reminding all concerned that Russia has never learned how to be really free.

As he dismantled the old system, Gorbachev never eliminated the mechanisms that make a dictatorship possible. The army shrank but never lost its influence, and the Soviet version of the military-industrial complex apparently retained its ability to commandeer the most desirable economic resources.

The KGB survived at full strength—hundreds of thousands of agents. Many of the hard-nosed Party hacks who maintained discipline for the old regime remained available for service. Censors never forgot how to censor. Prosecutors and judges still know how to take arbitrary orders from above, and probably do not know how to resist them. As the dismaying events of January 1991 made clear, Gorbachev himself never fully overcame the authoritarian instincts that he grew up with.

“They think they are real democrats,” Alexander Bovin, the political commentator, said prophetically in May 1990, speaking of Gorbachev and his colleagues. “But in fact, deep down, their commitment to democracy is still limited.” How could it be otherwise? An authoritarian political culture cannot learn democracy in five years.

Nor can a Soviet society that has lived through six years of perestroika quickly be reconfined in some new version of the old dictatorship. The Brezhnev-Andropov Soviet Union is gone; the pillars on which it stood have rotted away. In many parts of the country, citizens have achieved a significant measure of control over local affairs; they will resist giving that up. People have learned to speak their minds and to speak the truth. The communist mythology that propped up the old system has been destroyed. Would-be dictators might win initial support simply by promising stability and food, but that is not a compelling cause on which to rebuild the totalitarian system. Millions of Soviet citizens have cast their lot with the new thinking—people working in co-ops, people engaged in politics, readers of the liberal press, young technocrats and so on. Many took seriously Gorbachev’s promises of a “rule-of-law state.” They will not be easily cowed. If indeed the army and police are ready to try to reimpose totalitarian control, they will need to have an enormous appetite for blood.

VIII

The future does not belong to Gorbachev, but to others. Will they be the new democrats, who really do exist by the millions? Or will the new centurions of the Red Army and the KGB take control? They too have millions of allies in a culture whose tolerance for authoritarianism has been cultivated for centuries.

One possibility is that both groups will have a turn. First could come authoritarians in the style of General Wojciech

Jaruzelski's junta, which took power in Poland in 1981 to crush Solidarity. Eight years later Jaruzelski voluntarily gave power back to Solidarity after he had failed to find a way to govern effectively. Like Solidarity in 1981, democrats might have to wait their turn now. First we may see a period of reactionary retrenchment that leads to no positive result, and then another try at meaningful democratization and economic change.

If the future is unpredictable, the situation in some respects is clear. The country is collapsing, economically and politically. Nationalistic popular fronts have won the allegiance of majorities in many republics. The restoration of dictatorship might eliminate the continuing chaos, but it offers no prospect of solving the country's problems. The army and its friends would find reviving the economy even harder than Gorbachev did. They would have no practical solution to nationalist tensions. They would be unable to stop the rot. That is why Shevardnadze was right when he said, at the close of his dramatic resignation speech last December, that "the dictatorship will not succeed." I hope he was also right when he added that "the future belongs to democracy and freedom."

Gorbachev has thought a good deal about his place in history. Once, when asked to which earlier Russian leaders he compared himself, he listed three reformist czars: Peter the Great, Catherine the Great and Alexander II. But of course, he added, the one I feel closest to is Lenin.

Lenin won the revolution and destroyed the old order, but he died in 1924 at age 53, long before a new order was established. Stalin established it several years later.

Gorbachev will also have left the scene before the next new order is established. Like Lenin, Gorbachev was a missionary figure who could lead a crusade to a new Russia. He has the personality of a missionary—zealous, utterly self-confident, solemn to a fault. His determination to turn away from the past and start afresh was his greatest strength. But his zealotry and his self-confidence were confining. He could begin the process of reinventing his country, but at the critical moment he could not reinvent himself.

Perhaps Gorbachev will be remembered as the leader of the prologue to true perestroika—the real renewal of Russia. This is no small accomplishment. On the contrary, his is a heroic achievement, because Machiavelli was right when he observed that nothing is more difficult than taking the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.