RECASTING THE SOVIET STATE
Organizational Politics in the Gorbachev Era

Patrick Flaherty

The express train is gathering speed and everybody is partying in their compartments... but the engineer has gone mad and there are no brakes. Ahead lies death and the abyss.

Introduction
These lines come from Iurii Bondarev's Spenglerian 1985 novel *Igra* or *The Game*. The train hurtling out of control was Marx's locomotive of history bound no longer for the glory of a pre-ordained communism but somehow sidetracked onto a downgrade plunge towards economic, ecological and spiritual catastrophe. The apocalyptic presentiments of this pillar of the Soviet literary establishment certainly reflected the mounting sense of alarm within the power elite that the decrepit Brezhnev leadership was hopelessly overmatched by the dilemmas facing a country undergoing a crucial transition, and the resulting immobilism was allowing the political situation to deteriorate beyond redemption. This charged political climate may be setting the stage for an institutional transformation comparable in its historical import to the American New Deal.

This essay will limit its scope to the attempt of the Gorbachev government to recast the Soviet state on a foundation of new institutional arrangements and apportionment of administrative power. Organisational restructuring will be at the centre of power elite conflict during the first stage of the Gorbachev tenure, and the outcome of this struggle will determine how far the reform process will proceed. The first section will deal with the underlying causes of the crisis. The second and third sections will focus on the emergence of a reformed Marxism-Leninism legitimating a paradigmatic shift in state-society relations and the wars of position presently being waged within major professional groups. A conclusion, emphasising the potentials and limitation of the Soviet working class in this process, will follow.

1. The Limits of Stalinism
Tengiz Abuladze's allegorical anti-Stalinist film *Repentence* concludes with the lead character discovering that a road named for the late dictator ends
in a blind alley. Abel Aganbegian, Gorbachev's economic adviser, used a similar metaphor to describe the exhaustion of the traditional Stalinist growth strategy when he warned that if present development trends continue, the Soviet Union is headed towards an 'impasse'.

Authoritative government spokespeople openly voice the fear that 'if we do not move to reverse the deterioration of the Soviet Union, if we fail to bring about a radical breakthrough, the outcome of the struggle between capitalism and socialism will go against us, and the achievements of socialism will be lost'.

The Gorbachev administration has come to accept the validity of this bleak prognosis, and is now preparing the state and the nation to undertake a major reindustrialisation programme designed to prevent the country from declining into an Eastern bloc Britain, a former world power demoted to second tier status by an archaic administrative system and the concomitant degradation of its technological base. Gorbachev never loses an opportunity to scold audiences of an obdurate administrative elite that his government will not shrink from 'revolutionary' reforms to ensure that Soviet goods will become competitive on the international market by the end of the century.

Devising a way out of the Stalinist organisational cul-de-sac will be the key to survival for the Soviet Union as a core great power in the unremitting struggle of cold war empires. But this geopolitical imperative is just one of the systemic pressures which have created an historical opening for a candid comprehensive discussion of the Soviet political future.

Reform proponents can marshal a battery of alarming data to demonstrate that the Soviet economy is faltering dangerously within its present organisational parameters. An influential economist prefaced his restructuring proposals with the admonition that the average yearly combined growth rate of the accumulation and consumption funds had tumbled from 7.2 per cent to 3.1 per cent over the past two decades, and an immediate decline in living standards had been averted only by shifting capital from investment to consumption. In his view, this budgetary legerdemain was accomplished at the expense of future economic growth, and merely postponed the inevitable day of reckoning. Critics can also adduce a ream of figures which show how poorly the production capacity of the Soviet economy is being utilised, and the enormous potentials which could be harvested from a determined rationalisation. One Soviet official complained that the value of the yearly waste in a single metallurgical combine in his district was equivalent to three times the annual housing construction budget for the entire area, and only four per cent of this scrap was recycled. Another veteran economist pointed out the irony of the Soviet government boasts about far outstripping the United States in steel production while the vital metal still remained in short supply because roughly 17 per cent was squandered annually through discarded shavings and corrosion (10-12 million tons and 15 million tons...
respectively). These staggering losses resulting from negligence could easily be recovered if the enterprises consuming or warehousing steel had a material interest in employing the most elementary conservation procedures. The problem of the production of low-quality unsaleable goods has always bedeviled the Soviet economy but over the past decade, the growth of stockpiled remainders has come to surpass overall economic growth by 300 per cent. In 1981 for example, national revenue increased by 24.5 million roubles but the volume of remaindered goods was 29.3 billion roubles. The crippling deterioration of production rationality was indicated by the fact that the ratio of the value of unsold goods to new commodity value was 13 per cent in 1965 and 77 per cent in 1981. Palliative administrative measures have arrested the tailspin of the late Brezhnev era for the time being but an authoritative reform economist emphasised the continued fragility of the present recovery, how the economy with relatively minor setbacks could slump back into and become mired in the 'zero-growth' trough of the early eighties.

Beyond statistics, there is mounting concern within the Soviet power elite that the 'machine has got out of control', that effective authority has become so institutionally Balkanized and disjointed behind a centralized facade that the system has finally lost that modicum of collective rationality needed to forestall a paralysing crisis. An authoritarian statist economy essentially trades capitalist market anarchy for the externalities arising from the innate pathologies of an organisational process. A Polish economist identified similar trends in his own country's development, and concluded that the orthodox Stalinist antithesis of plan contra market 'inevitably leads to a situation of neither plan nor market' but the rule of the homeostatic logic of administrative centralisation, which can perpetuate its own form of departmental anarchy and exponentially growing waste. The co-ordinating capacity of the Soviet state has become so impaired by this automatic bureaucratic morbidity that a specialist on technological innovation can claim that the rout of the Kosygin reforms actually abetted a slide back into a 'natural economy regime' where value categories had been once again totally obliterated. Radical reformers are now openly scorning the 'masquerade planning' of the Brezhnev era which did little more than 'ratify inertial development and compile a record of what has ground on from Five-Year-Plan to Five-Year-Plan'. The formal organisational monism of Brezhnevite ideology served as a legitimating fiction which masked the fragmentation of the Soviet economy into a sectoral anarchy that reduced the state to a slave of short-term necessity.

The Gorbachev administration has inherited this unresolved state-steering crisis brought on by a chronic overload of government administrative capacity. This resulted in a breakdown of effective central control over the broad lines of economic development and an increasingly danger-
ous drift. Official acknowledgement of the protracted 'recession' has expedited the emergence of a broad-based consensus within the power elite that 'economic regions have been transformed into gigantic and very intricate multi-branch complexes and that it is no longer possible to administer them in the old way on the principle: All is more visible from the centre'. The reform programme is predicated on the supposition that the principal contradiction fettering Soviet economic development is this interaction between the excessive concentration of central authority and the diminishing governability of both the economy and society. The Gorbachev braintrust has taken upon itself the responsibility for devising streamlined, institutional mechanisms and a more flexible organisational politics which would be able to co-ordinate the multi-layered complexity of a social organism no longer amenable to being integrated entirely from above.

The Gorbachev reform coalition shares a common conviction that the endemic problems besetting the Soviet economy cannot be reduced to random accident or personal and institutional egoism. Abel Aganbegain places the blame squarely on the inherent 'vices of the operative economic mechanism', the endogamous structural contradictions of a hyper-centralised administrative system which forces its subordinate sub-units to retreat into a solipsistic autarchy for their own self-protection. As examples of intertial systemic obtuseness, he pointed to the 200,000 ambiguous and often directly conflictual pieces of administrative legislation presently governing enterprise operations, and an autistic investment process which goes on projecting the construction of a huge new tractor factory right alongside an identical Gigant. The latter comes at a time when the Soviet Union is producing more than four times as many tractors as the United States and still obtaining an agricultural productivity rate 20–25 per cent below that of the American level. In the early sixties, East German economists would refer sardonically to this form of plan aggregation as 'Investrüinen' to describe the vortex effect exerted by established industrial complexes on the bargaining procedures determining the allocation of investment and resources. Gorbachev echoes the complaints of the Khrushchev era that this investment bulimia is directly attributable to the concerted efforts of entrenched 'departmental interests' to obstruct the transfer of investments from smokestack industries to new priority branches on the cutting edge of technological change. The Soviet Union is confronting not only a marked growth deceleration but the protraction of a wasteful enstructured pattern of extensive growth resistant to the abandonment of obsolete production plants and the ready assimilation of new technologies.

The latest wave of reform proposals assume that the Soviet Union attained a 'developed industrial character' during the early seventies, and this transition necessitated a corresponding administrative and techno-
logical restructuring which the Brezhnev government was unwilling or more likely unable to implement. Tradition Stalinist *dirigisme* was never able to extract anything near the full productive potential of a precariously meshed economy comprising 1.2 million administrative sub-units which manufacture and consume twelve million separate items. The failure of the previous government to persuade the administrative elite to submit voluntarily to rationalising reforms, has saddled its successor with a crisis situation where the present system is no longer consistently capable of yielding that 3.7 per cent annual growth rate which Soviet economists generally stipulate as the minimum necessary to ensure modestly improving general living standards. Gorbachev gave his *nihil obstat* to the reformist credo that the Soviet economy is undergoing an historic structural climacteric when he compared the orthodox corpus of political economy inherited from the Stalinist epoch to 'old clothes which are coming apart at the seams'. Gorbachev's recent appointment as head of the science and education department of the Central Committee went even further in questioning whether a serious economic theory had ever existed in the Soviet Union, and calling for the elaboration of a new substantive political economy of socialism. Gorbachev and his intellectual entourage appear to be laying the groundwork for an economic strategy adapted to the needs of a mature economy and incorporating the innovative thought of reform academics like the Novosibirsk school which had been consigned to the margins of policy debates since the late sixties. A fundamental reformulation of Soviet political economy would almost certainly encompass a determined shift away from command planning to the use of indicative economic levers like profit, credit and interest; the increased use of cybernetics; and a greater reliance on scarcity prices and market forces to regulate the investment process.

Interlinked crises of system rationality and legitimation have created a political opening for younger power elite elements to spring to the head of a reform coalition with a mandate to construct a 'new economic mechanism' that would enable the regime to harness presently squandered productive forces. The new leadership demonstratively proclaims itself to be the representative of the politically cohesive 'generations of the Soviet period' which have matured out of the socially variegated transitional society of the Stalinist epoch. Gorbachev expressed his own confidence in the modern consensual nature of the Soviet polity when he dismissed conservative disquiet about democratisation with the assertion that the 'healthy forces' of all classes can contain and neutralize political extremism emanating from either the Russite Right or the anarcho-syndicalist Left. Gorbachev can now turn the tables of patriotism against his own opposition by accusing it of 'lacking faith in our people'. Brezhnevian immobilism has also bred a sizeable contingent of well-educated young cadres at all levels of the apparatus who have been
politicised by years of creative torpor and the lack of promotional opportunities. In fact, the Gorbachev administration has gone beyond elite coalition building to seek a broader social consensus in which to anchor its reform programme. Gorbachev and his allies seem confident that they can use the regime crisis proactively to establish a hegemonic relationship between a streamlined state and insurgent strata of an elite generation frustrated with stylized politics and impatient for a liberalisation which would at last free them to flex their potentially formidable political muscle.

The extraordinary political autonomy of the Stalinist state has been steadily circumscribed over the past thirty years by the proliferation of systemic reproduction imperatives compelling the leadership to assure a serviceable growth rate, and anticipate the interests and needs of its key social constituencies. The first structural imperative inducing the reform coalition to delimit the state economic role is a widespread realisation that effective state authority is strictly bounded by its limited capacity for information gathering and assessment in an advanced industrial society. Soviet cybernetics specialists compare the ‘informatization and computerization of society. . . to the industrialization of three centuries ago in its world-historical significance’. Reformers can use a disarming scientistic discourse to make the radical libertarian argument that traditional state structures are in danger of being overwhelmed by a deluge of technological flows in 'contemporary conditions where information is not only created quickly but ages quickly'. The free flow of information has become essential to optimal economic development in an era of rapid technological change, and the state must relinquish its outmoded monopoly in this realm to industrial associations on the forefront of production innovation. The surprising speed with which the Gorbachev administration has been able to broaden the scope of free expression, may be largely attributable to a grudging accommodation within the power elite to the exigencies of a ‘Scientific—Technological Revolution' driving the accelerated growth of the late eighties. The Gorbachev reformers may be more enthralled with microprocessors than Mill but their apparent acquiescence to the demands of a new industrial age has facilitated the recent publication of a salvo of pragmatic and principled attacks on the network of state censorship which are becoming ever more explicit and sweeping in their political implications.

A second structural constraint on the state is the relentless specialisation of the division of labour and a resultant differentiation of social strata. At the foundation of the reformist organisational critique is a novel if tentative acknowledgement of Soviet politics as a 'complex social process realized through the struggle of different social groups and strata'. Given this conflictual pluralistic reality, the state must encourage a 'broadening of the opportunities for labour collectives and regional or professional groups to express, discuss, and defend their interests openly at every administrative level'. The coalescing social policy of the Gorbachev govern-
ment assumes that the regime must tap the latent productive potential of these increasingly class conscious and unified professional strata to power the national economy forward into a new technological era. This public recognition of the diversity of interests in Soviet society and the need to reconcile them, provides compelling proof of a genuine desire for democratisation among some elite reformist elements even if this was at first largely couched in technocratic terms. In a startling turn of events testifying to the quickening pace of the reform struggle and the burgeoning strength of liberal reformers, Gorbachev has gone on record hailing the importance of democracy as an ‘independent value’ essential in its own right to healthy social development and not just a mere utilitarian means to other ends. This acknowledgement of a plurality of interests is also double-edged because it allows reformers for the first time to present a sophisticated trenchant critique of bureaucratisation which admits the possibility of the existence of ‘real contradictions between the administrators and the administered’, the presence of elite strata whose particularistic stake in the defence of parasitic privileges or the preservation of outmoded managerial structures better suited to their level of technical competence, runs counter to the general social interest. As a means of providing a global theoretical framework for this ideological transvaluation, the Politburo ‘architect of Glasnost’—Aleksandr Iakovlev—has begun referring to contemporary Soviet society as Razvivaiushchiia Sotsializm (Developing or Advancing Socialism) with evident dynamic conflictual connotations instead of the static complacent Brezhnevian category of Razvitoi Sotsializm (Developed Socialism). This seemingly picayune change of modifiers will probably mark the opening round of an explicit radical reform campaign to initiate an anti-bureaucratic revolution which would make it impossible to sustain anachronistic methods of governance, an anaesthetising ideological discourse, and previous patterns of alliance within the power elite. Developing Socialism is likely to become the new doctrinal leitmotiv of Gorbachev’s revolutionary reform programme, a praxis-oriented revision of orthodox Soviet Marxism—Leninism with an eye towards justifying thoroughgoing socio-economic change.

A dramatic manifestation of this ongoing elite metamorphosis rooted in profound technico-economic trends was a scathing polemic by an economist defending professional autonomy against the arbitrary intrusions of the nachalnik or ill-educated party generalist. His immediate target was a Nomenklatura system which still gave preference to unskilled politically conformist Komsomol cadres in the adjudication of disputes and promotions. This champion of the professional strata complained that party generalists were opportunists whose behaviour was governed by a short-sighted ‘conjunctural mentality’ that impelled them to avoid any venturesome actions which might jeopardise their guaranteed regular
promotion to the next rung of the hierarchical ladder. As a result, the Perestroika was in danger of becoming deadlocked in 'clashes between brilliant professionals working in local areas and districts or even regional administrative structures'. The reform economist was making the radical argument that the political centre of gravity within the Soviet ruling class had shifted from the traditionally predominant parvenu cadre who clogged Komsomol and party generalist career channels, to the new largely self-reproducing professional strata of the scientific-technical intelligentsia who were riding the latest wave of industrial change. He advised the Gorbachev administration that an invincible reform campaign had to be premised on the technocratic credo that 'democracy will bear fruit where professionalism triumphs'.

A prominent malefactor in reform polemics is that 25-30 per cent of the party apparatus composed of individuals with a 'non-professional education who have never worked in production'. The Gorbachev administration has openly declared its intention of weeding out that quarter of the state bureaucracy which 'conceals its incompetence behind a semblance of work that boils down to paper-chasing and chicanery'. The aim is to replace office-bound and technically ignorant dead wood who have come up through the patronage fast track, with professionalised specialists who have had hands-on training in their particular area of expertise. The campaign of de-Brezhnevisation has not stopped short of blaming much of the nation's current predicament on the fact that the 'political, business and moral qualities of a number of leaders, especially those of the highest rank, did not correspond in full measure to an extremely complex and crucial period of development'.

This organisational crusade to professionalise the Soviet state goes beyond mundane factional politics. The reform government is trying to foment popular animosity against delimited strata of 'nomenklatura circles'. Similarly the reformers appear bent on delegitimating a segment of the Soviet power elite which has long dominated the political process through its solid grounding in the administrative engines of crude extensive growth. G. Lisichkin unabashedly advocates a rapid comprehensive marketisation of the Soviet economy as the most effective means of breaking up the existing power structure which is undergirded by a 'bloc of unskilled labour' ranging from intrusive central bureaucrats to their social base in the army of unskilled and supposedly overremunerated manual labour. The prominent neo-liberal economist insisted that a radical organisational aggiornamento must be conducted on the principle that skilled labour is 'our future... and it must finally win the right to call the music for which it pays', instead of politics being arrogated to those unproductive elites who 'squander the national wealth'. Lisichkin conceded that an 'archaic levelling consciousness' predominates among the bulk of a working class which he viewed as 'enfeebled by a long-term dependence'
on a collectivist social welfare state, but he urged with Spencerian obduracy that the Gorbachev government press ahead with its assault against the 'feudal' egalitarian normative matrix which imposed a strait-jacket on national development. The neo-liberal campaign against 'levelling' and for 'social justice' is expressly designed to dismantle a system of what is perceived as enervating Garantirovannost (literally Guarantedness or the guarantee of a wide range of socio-economic entitlements) in order to restore that dull economic compulsion which will facilitate the emergence of a more dynamic economy. If successful, this campaign would allow the Gorbachev government to engineer a realignment of the Soviet ruling class which would enable the accession to hegemonic predominance of insurgent professionalised strata oriented towards an intensive growth strategy. Viewed on an abstract structuralist level, the basic conflict within the Soviet ruling class is that now being fought out between the conservative Traeger of conventional extensive growth and the reform Traeger of intensive growth which is ready to abrogate the established political equilibrium and the social contract underpinning this, because it is seen to be impeding the introduction of an 'optimalist' development strategy.

The Gorbachev government is intent on reforming the political system to take account of the increasingly salient class dimensions of Soviet society and the fact that the various autonomous spheres of the production mechanism have acquired their own autonomous dynamics, which must be aggregated into the political process. Gorbachev enthusiastically embraced this pluralistic conception in declaring that 'politics will yield the necessary results if it is founded on a precise reckoning of the interests of classes, social groups, and individuals'. This ostensibly innocuous platitude translates into a legitimation of the claims of professional interest groups for guaranteed access to the policy process and the parcelling out of authority to these strata within their institutional spheres. The Gorbachev braintrust is undertaking the state-managed deconcentration and marketisation of a hyper-centralised economy which has been programmed and organisationally conditioned at all levels by centrally accounted and imposed use-values for over fifty years. This formidable enterprise represents the crucial first step in the restructuring of the means of administration to meet the demands of an intensive growth pattern, and set free that 'communist businessman' believed to be trapped within the bosom of many officials who are shackled by the command planning system.

The new General Secretary and the reform party within the CPSU have made known their readiness to use the present 'pre-crisis situation' to break through the immobilism of the late Brezhnev era and accept the risks inherent in making a transition to a new form of economic growth. But the political parameters of the statist mode of production seem more than broad enough to enable the Gorbachev administration to
use a mobilisation of ascendant elites to rationalise and refine an over-extended state through the dismantling of bureaucratic layers rendered superfluous by the introduction of the more decentralised indicative planning techniques of an intensive accumulation regime. The Soviet Union seems to be following a course diametrically opposite to that of classical capitalist development. Instead of impelling greater government economic intervention as in all Western countries, the crisis of an intensive transition is promoting the deconcentration of an omnicomprehensive dirigistic state that had served as the engine of extensive development for the past half-century. The content of the accumulation process had undergone a qualitative metamorphosis since the Stalinist epoch, and this in turn opens the way to a fundamental refurbishing of outmoded administrative forms. This rearticulation of state-society relations should provide political reformers with a persuasive rationale to push for the democratisation of a stultified administrative system and greater regularised elite access to the policy-making process. The prospects for a liberalising reform now seem more promising than ever before in the post-Stalin period with the convergence of shifts in the material-technical basis of accumulation and the radical realignment of the Soviet power elite. The following section will deal with the type of polity most likely to emerge from this change in the political economy of Soviet society.

2. The Politics of Organisational Reform
All major Soviet political reform in the post-Stalin period has been the product of active or latent pressure from below and an ambivalent response from above. True to this pattern, the originally narrow technocratic vision of the Gorbachev reform coalition has been forcibly broadened by a combination of conservative resistance, and the open or covert rebellion of major professional-managerial groups against the paternalistic constraints of state control since the beginning of 1986. The urgent need for an administrative restructuring has revealed to all concerned the reliance of the regime on these elite strata for its survival, and the knowledge of this mutual dependency has furnished activist elements of these functional groups with the leverage to negotiate or simply appropriate a greater measure of autonomy. Fedor Burlatskii, a Gorbachev brainstruster, was simply ratifying these incipient shifts in elite power relations when he chided conservatives to abandon the axiomatic conviction that 'everything associated with the state is good and all associated with society is bad'. This tentative rehabilitation of civil society signals the recognition of the reform faction that only at its own peril can the state continue to ignore the emergence of increasingly cohesive and politically conscious vanguard nuclei within the various strata of the dominant class.

In a similar vein, Gorbachev's endorsement of Lenin's remark that 'socialism is senseless without democracy', poses a direct challenge to the
statist interpretation of Leninism that was enshrined as the official ideology of the regime during the thirties. Gorbachev's brief political tenure has witnessed the doctrinal resurrection of the long disregarded libertarian self-management elements of Lenin's writings, especially *Immediate Tasks* of Spring 1918 with its emphasis on the political correctives of direct democracy, and the commentaries on the NEP with their advocacy of a co-operative mixed economy as the only antidote to bureaucratisation. This remodelled Leninism disputes the central Stalinist legitimating myth of an omnicomprehensive state as the sole trustworthy protagonist of socialist construction. This old fiction justified the continued existence of an authoritarian governance structure that had long ago ceased to meet the needs of a complex and highly differentiated society with a growing popular participatory orientation towards politics. This transvaluation of the patristic writings enables reform proponents to make the formerly heretical claim that some forms of state intervention into civil society are `unnatural', that the state had previously 'taken far too much upon itself and placed too little trust in the working person, his or her initiative, desire to create, and potentials for self-management'. The rekindling of these abstruse controversies over the Leninist legacy calls into question the formerly impregnable orthodox conception of the state-society dialectic, and lays the ideological groundwork for a radical reordering of Soviet politics.

The reformers are undeniably sincere in their desire to replace the prevailing *Samoupraystvo* (the tyranny of local political machines) with an administrative system founded on the principle of *Samoupravlenie* (Self-Management), the recasting of the Soviet state into an apparatus which governs 'through the people rather than for the people'. These abstract prescriptions for the regime's ills translate practically into a call for the devolution of power to foster the 'growth of the initiative and autonomy of state and social units, the strengthening of the self-management function in their operation'. Proponents of decentralisation target the huge corset of *Nelziatchiki* or 'nay-saying officials' which has grown up around the rigidly hierarchical organisational structures forged during the administrative revolution of the First Five-Year-Plan. In the view of the reformers, the Soviet state can only turn the economy about by abolishing 'superfluous prohibitions unjustified by business or common sense', and learning above all 'to trust the people more'. The crux of the liberal critique is that in trying to control too much in a mature economy, the state ends up controlling nothing and effective authority will continue to slip through its fist no matter how tightly clenched. Trusting the people really means that the state has no choice but to place greater confidence in the autonomous self-regulation of the major elite peak associations and enterprises policed by market forces instead of bureaucratic diktat. In its specifically Soviet interpretation, self-management will be used to
regenerate the vital lateral connective tissue of a fragmented economy by deconcentrating authority and responsibility to the local level while simultaneously equipping a streamlined executive with the capacity to steer overall national development.

In a April 1987 address, Nikolai Ryzhkov gave an authoritative imprimatur to these reform trends in Soviet organisational thought when he coined a revised definition of centralism corresponding to a mature industrial economy and an advanced society with ample reserves of well-educated cadres. The Prime Minister declared the future intent of the central apparatus to ‘concentrate its energies on the strategic problems of the economy and the supervision of general state interests while decisively freeing itself from the detailed regulation of the work of the lower levels’. This blessing for micro-economic decentralisation was followed soon after by a Politburo decree approving the establishment of 'wholesale trade and direct links between consumers and producers'. The executive encouragement of horizontal relations between local enterprises marks a pivotal and probably decisive breakthrough for the proponents of extended marketisation within the reform camp. Conservatives have obdurately resisted enterprises being granted the right to choose their own suppliers and customers because broader managerial commercial discretion would commensurately circumscribe the authority of the far-flung administrative agencies that were interposed as a surrogate for the market during the Stalin epoch, and would quite likely deal them a mortal blow. If consistently implemented over the formidable obstacle of chronic supply scarcities, administrative devolution and the marketisation of micro-economic commerce would truly work an organisational revolution within the context of the Stalinist command planning labyrinth.

The ideological groundwork is already being laid for the reform polity expected to emerge from these structural changes in administrative organisation. A recent editorial in the main party theoretical journal read like a corporatist manifesto in announcing that 'there have been established and are already in operation new social organizations expressing the interests of the various social, demographic, and professional groups of the population'. Burlatskii elaborated this new Soviet doctrinal rendition of unity in diversity when he castigated the homogenized Panglossian Marxism of the Brezhnev years, and saluted the new leadership for restoring the 'dialectic method' to the social sciences. He cajoled his readers to recognise that 'pluralism (mnozhestvennost), competitiveness, and honest struggle' were legitimate constituent elements of the internal dialectic of an advanced socialist society, the contradictory leavening essential to its forward propulsion. All social groups from workers to writers were said to be 'competing among themselves in the process of the creation of material and spiritual values' whose intrinsic worth should be appraised by a free consumer-provided access to a bountiful market. In this
endeavour to create the political mediations needed to integrate a more diverse Soviet society, Burlatskii warned the public to brace itself for `genuine structural reforms' and 'changes of the production relations in principle'.

Like most pluralist theorists, Burlatskii skirted the sensitive questions of power relations and group hierarchies but he did not shy from predicting that these benign forms of competition would have a strong corrosive effect on the position of established elites who relied on 'rank' and `artificially created deficits' to foist their Khaltura (schlock) on a captive consumer. However he left no doubt that the primary objective of this design for a competitive socialist economy was to 'place the direct producer in the sort of conditions which would stimulate him/her to perform high quality work; instil a profound interest in the use of the latest achievements in science, techniques and technology; and improve the competence and professionalism of the work force'. Burlatskii expects marketisation and greater government reliance on its diffuse impersonal economic coercion to inject a competitive dynamism into a sluggish economy facing a difficult economic transition. The overriding concern of Burlatskii was to amplify every economic actor's sense of personal responsibility for their success or failure, and the rapid inculcation of this invigorating individualism entailed the immediate exposure of all classes to market discipline without the accustomed collectivist insulation against adversity in the form of enterprise bankruptcy or joblessness. Burlatskii seeks to construct a political system which would open career fast lanes to people capable of sublimating a much greater measure of economic insecurity into gainful individual initiative and consumerist acquisitiveness. The paramount aim is to cultivate risk-taking techno-entrepreneurial elite along Japanese lines with an expansive driving innovative vision and the expertise to translate it into reality. Many Soviet liberals evince far greater admiration for the Japanese organisational model than the West European or American. They perceive it as more congruent to their own national needs because both countries share more collectivist political cultures which managers can capitalise upon to transform a refractory working class into 'their ally', and mitigate many of the anomic corollaries of a consumerist possessive individualism. This transvaluation of old vices into modern virtues was made mundanely evident by an engineer who contended that if the state wants Soviet administrative cadres to perform like their Japanese counterparts, then it must be ready to pay them the `same wages as Japanese firms pay their scholars and engineers'. The current fad for Japanese managerial theory among some Soviet liberals seems to be as shallow as its earlier incarnation in the West. In both cases, the myth of an idealised enterprise Gemeinschaft is being used to cloak a search for a new foundation on which to reorder the relations between managerial strata and the working class so that the latter is largely divested
of its capacity for collective protection.

Gorbachev’s speech to the XXVIIth Party Congress suggested that he originally intended to limit radical structural reform to the economy with the process of democratisation held in abeyance until the organisational preconditions were in place.26 But over the course of 1986, the reform programme became steadily more comprehensive with perhaps a cathartic role being played by the Chernobyl disaster which shook the Soviet establishment to its foundations. Gorbachev appeared to be radicalising in office like other aspiring reformers. By the late autumn, the General Secretary was running against the Right on the public platform that no amount of technocratic reform would pull the Soviet economy out of the doldrums if the political sphere remained stunted and frustrated. The new government was now signalling its acceptance of the radical proposition that the political system must be adapted to the needs of a pluralist conflictual society if a listless economy was to be ‘dynamized’ by tapping into the latent productive potential of the professional strata.

With this more definitive commitment to the supreme value of human capital in the reform process, Gorbachev is becoming even bolder in counterposing the imagery of the ‘humane and liberal’ Soviet socialism of the immediate future to the atavistic residuum of the authoritarian mechanistic productivism carried over from the Stalin epoch.27 Burlatskii was sufficiently emboldened to exhume the ‘Ethical Socialism’ of Otto Bauer as an ‘important constituent part of scientific socialism’ which had been unjustly ploughed under during the terror of the thirties. An elite consensus has crystallised around a recognition of the essential linkage between future economic dynamism and liberalisation, which is imparting a vigorous momentum to the campaign of an enlightened leadership to civilise a state apparatus still pervaded by the callous and expedient ethos of an epoch of accelerated industrialisation.

The reform liberalism of the Gorbachev administration also contains a conspicuous meritocratic component that in eradicating caste privilege, simultaneously seeks to institute ‘only one hierarchy—a hierarchy of personal qualities based on capabilities, talents, knowledge, experience, force of character and the aspiration to lofty ideals’.28 The course of the Soviet reform process to date seems to be confirming the sociological truism that structure is destiny, and it is easy to conjecture which social forces would find this meritocratic creed most congenial to the advancement of their collective interests. The vanguard elements of the professional strata will clearly be best positioned to take advantage of this ideology of equal opportunity to consolidate their hegemonic predominance. This meritocratic ideology should provide a versatile combat weapon for a reform elite bent on rearranging the mechanisms for allocating rewards and privileges while avoiding a fundamental alteration of power relations. The merit principle can be used to justify the
continuing inequalities stemming from a specialised hierarchical division of labour, and provide a credible legitimating ideology for the social stewardship of a professionalised establishment composed of politically ascendant reform elites.

The initial thrust of the campaign for democratisation was predominately technocratic in its rationale, and reflected the newly aroused political assertiveness of elite strata previously deprived of direct access to the policy making process. However limited in scope at present, the debate around political decentralisation is still having positive collateral effects in publicising the need for a rationalisation and humanisation of an ossified administrative system. A universally beneficial consequence of the democratisation discussion is a renewed state commitment to the establishment of a Rechtsstaat founded upon the ‘principle of the independence of the courts’. The Soviet equivalent of a Chief Justice castigated lower courts for their long record of capitulations before 'direct or camouflaged pressure' from regional political barons seeking to fix judicial decisions that might expose the incompetence and venality of their organisational machines. As a first step towards strengthening the autonomy of the judiciary, he suggested that the investigative agency be placed entirely outside the procurator's office as a means of creating a counterpoise between the judiciary and the police. This much publicised campaign for the rationalisation of the legal system targets the 'legal nihilism' prevalent within the administrative elite, and seeks to reassure the general population that the law is binding on all from janitor to minister'.

The primary aim of the strengthening of the judiciary is to enable its subordinate arms to deal more aggressively with endemic regional corruption and override the resistance of local machine bosses opposed to restructuring. But these constant reaffirmations of socialist legality in a system characterised by arbitrariness and expedience should serve to reinforce a formative legal fabric and open a broader discussion on the rule of law in a mature industrial society. Proponents of a Rechtsstaat no longer conceal their agenda of 'enhancing the level of the legal culture of the population, and overcoming the philistine notions' that more capital punishment, tougher sentencing, and expanded police powers will stem the spread of crime. After the January plenum, party liberals could go beyond veiled allusions to cite directly the 'lessons of 1937' and the Stalinist terror to combat its modern legacy in the form of police false incrimination of grassroots activists and the frequent use of mental and physical torture against suspects in non-political criminal investigations. Events have moved so rapidly over the past year that a prominent physician can now call in a major mass publication for the establishment of a codified bill of rights to shield Soviet citizens from the possible recrudescence of Stalinism and the 'worthless machinery of an investigative system which is still based on the presumption of guilt'. Soviet jurists as a professional
group have played a conspicuous role in the democratisation campaign while lobbying aggressively to increase the nomenklatura standing of the judiciary in the government table of ranks, both in terms of budgetary allocation and relative clout in the political process with respect to other social groups. The newly exalted status of the judiciary was certified at the January plenum with the unprecedented appointment of a practising lawyer and liberal legal theorist to one of the key Central Committee secretarial posts. A. Lukianov became the first of Gorbachev's braintrust to justify the strengthening of legal-rational norms by referring explicitly to the history of the 'repression of the period of the cult of personality of Stalin, the violation of socialist legality and voluntarist harsh blows' against society. He is also conducting an energetic campaign to reverse the traditional heavy skewing of Soviet jurisprudence towards civil obligations, and make citizens aware of the 'entire arsenal of rights belonging to them'. Activist legal professionals have entered into a formidable alliance with other liberal segments of the elite seeking genuine Rechtsstaat security for civil society against a chronically invasive state.

A greater state recognition of the salutary countervailing function of the courts has been paralleled by overt bids for professional autonomy by other groups. In a typical instance, an architect blamed the thirty year proliferation of monotonously similar highrise eyesores on the 'technocracy' of the construction ministries with ultimate jurisdiction over all phases of the building process. 31 This monopoly enabled ministerial officials concerned only with a narrow bonus-maximising logic to bury aesthetics in speed with its lucrative immediate returns. As a remedy, he proposed increased autonomy for the lowly architectural bureaus within the ministries and the vesting of these with comprehensive authority for co-ordinating longterm urban planning. The recently established Architects' Professional Association has won its first major lobbying victory with the creation of a ministerial level committee on architecture designed expressly to counter the self-serving utilitarian impulses of the construction bureaus. However, reformers within the architectural profession concede that the 'construction moloch' will be a long time overcoming its ingrained predilections to intimidate and ignore architects. 32 Architects have been well schooled in a 'spirit of professional conformism', and are still ill-equipped to resist 'construction aggression'. Thus architectural reformers have no illusions about the difficulty of transforming overnight a moribund appendage of the state construction agency into an activist 'creative union', but they remain determined to bring about this qualitative political metamorphosis.

Similar developments are visible in the universities. In advancing an argument for greater academic autonomy, a noted social science professor pointed out that thirty years ago, there were few faculty members with advanced degrees. 33 He conceded that the scarcity of scholastic credentials
may have then justified a rigid system of state oversight but today, almost all university lecturers held at least the Soviet equivalent of a doctorate. A continuation of the same petty tutelage made incisive and cogent teaching impossible for highly trained academic professionals, and this in turn contributed to the spread of political cynicism among a more sophisticated generation of Soviet youth. The reform scholar used the professionalisation of Soviet academia and the legitimation needs of the regime to build a persuasive case for the devolution of curriculum control to the university collectives and the relaxation of constraints on intellectual inquiry.

Such professional consciousness was also evident in the enthusiastic welcome of a stage director for the curtailment of the authority of the `cultural organs' or state censorship bodies to intervene summarily in the creative process. 34 'Directorial hegemony' subject only to the democratic control of the acting company was the new guiding principle in Soviet theatre operations, and the host of new experimental theatres springing up in the major cities must be allowed 'to be freely born and freely die'. Soviet journalists are also now campaigning for 'greater freedom of action' in their investigative forays against official incompetence, corruption, and misdeeds. A concerted attempt to promote greater reliance on the media as an agent of public advocacy was evident in the assurances of a prominent journalist that concerned citizens should not hesitate to contact the press when 'state methods and concepts go against the voice of society'. Over the past decade, the Soviet media—especially Pravda—have tried to stake out a moral preserve for itself as a social ombudsperson against official injustice in a political system where judicial redress is a dubious possibility at best. The progressive wing of the journalists' union is now openly lobbying for the institutionalisation of an activist fourth estate and the establishment of firm guarantees against official reprisal. The demands of Soviet journalists for professional autonomy are addressed as much to public opinion as to the reform leadership, and it is clear from their polemics that they regard an informed and politicised populace as the best guarantee of press freedom. The Soviet art world is also flexing its professional muscles with the vesting of ultimate control over the content of exhibitions in gallery commissions instead of state censors with their reflexive resort to the 'authoritarian gesture: Get rid of it'. A prominent art historian is now lobbying publicly for the establishment of a museum of contemporary art for the display of indigenous schools of art which were officially proscribed during the Brezhnev era. The potentially most far-reaching corollary of this artistic insurgency has been its ringing defence of cultural freedom:

I met an artist who thought differently but those who think differently in art, are by no means anti-state people. He simply thinks in other categories and this
is wonderful. Generally speaking, all art and culture were created by people who thought in their own way.

Such endorsements of cultural pluralism have not been seen in the Soviet mass media since the twenties, and it is clearly bound up with the drive for democratisation in other spheres.

Most dramatically, the election of a Jewish non-party rebel, Elem Klimov, to the head of the cinematographers' union was nothing short of an open revolt against the state cultural establishment and an unparalleled assertion of professional autonomy by a major segment of the Soviet intelligentsia.  

Cultural reformers point to the successful rebellion of the film-makers and Gorbachev's ex post facto endorsement as a model for the democratisation of vital social spheres through a well mounted drive from below. Progressive intellectuals cite the exemplary 'inquiring spirit, dynamism, and militancy' of the cinematographers' union in the reform struggle since the election upset as a standard for other traditionally servile creative associations to emulate as they strive to transform themselves into authentic union movements capable of 'defending professional interests'. However the new union has been stymied in its initial efforts to secure the liquidation of the 'multi-tiered' state structures which still dangle like a bureaucratic sword of Damocles above nominally independent studios. The preservation of functionally redundant administrative structures harbours the obvious threat of a restoration of the status quo ante if the process of cultural liberalisation runs into difficulties. The more militant members of the union are urging the Klimov leadership to put the 'euphoric period' of the past year behind it, and fire up the membership through an even more thoroughgoing organisational democratisation to resist all future encroachments on their autonomy.

As astonishing as the election of Klimov was the appointment of Grigorii Baklanov as the chief editor of the prestigious literary journal Znamia (Banner).

Baklanov is also Jewish, non-party, a pioneer of the 'Trench Truth' tendency in Soviet war literature which was bitterly detested by the Right, and the author of what may well be the most psychologically penetrating of all the anti-Stalinist novels of the sixties—July 1941. He began his tenure as editor with a polemical broadside against obstructionist literary conservatives who were less concerned about sponsoring a cultural renaissance than 'preserving their undeserved privileges and that style of work and life which challenges nothing but is rewarded by a golden rain of honours'. He gave a provocative indication of the direction in which his new editorial team would take Znamia by announcing the imminent publication of previously suppressed anti-Stalinist works by Bek and Tvardovskii. Not as spectacular but no less culturally significant was the appointment of another committed anti-Stalinist, Sergei Zalygin, as the editor of the leading Soviet literary journal
Novyi Mir (New World). Even before his election, Zalygin had made no secret of his disgust with the reign of literary mediocrity during the Brezhnev era. Instead of the usual ritual genuflection to a classic socialist realist author, Zalygin urged an audience of writers to emulate Gabriel Garcia Marquez in his use of phantasmagorical hyperbole to distil the essence of a complex moral situation. This undemonstrative defiance of conventional literary canons was capped by a singling out of Marquez's *Autumn of the Patriarch* and its dissection of the intricacies of the 'cult of personality' as an edifying lesson which should be taken to heart by superficial and timid Soviet writers. Immediately after assuming his new post, Zalygin delivered a forthright public defence of the creative autonomy of the writer against the literary Right in asking why an 'author should conform to the thinking of the critic rather than his own'. The resurgence of the liberal forces in the Writers' Union was not as sweeping as the leadership turnover in the film and theatre organisations. The conservative editor of the provincial journal *Volga* can still profess to be dismayed at the avalanche of critical stories pouring across his desk which present the Brezhnev era as the 'exclusive triumph of theft, bribery, and alcoholism'. But the tide of political events has forced most of the literary Right to bide their time and pay lip service to the need for a cultural restructuring while anticipating a future retrenchment in these spheres. Zalygin drew the lesson from the defeat of the sixties that the progressive intelligentsia should never underestimate the 'tenacity' of this unliterature and the social forces which sustain it. Once-before defeated, the literary liberals now appear resolved to a protracted and unremitting war of position with the Right until they have cleared an inviolable creative space for an autonomous writers' union.

These preliminary explicit and oblique manifestations of a greater willingness to buck establishment diktats in the cultural sphere soon escalated into an unprecedented salvo of public attacks on the minions of censorship as 'vampires' draining the lifeblood out of the Soviet drama. This was accompanied by summonses to challenge the 'sway of unprincipled semi-literate bureaucrats over the realm of the intellect and culture'. The strategic outlook of the reformers runs a broad gamut at present. Liberals preach a judicious caution in maintaining that the success of cultural democratisation is ultimately dependent on building a previously non-existent relation of trust between suspicious state oversight agencies and the intelligentsia. Cultural revolutionaries like the poet, Andrei Voznesenskii, are exhorting their more wary colleagues to stop 'placing their trust in a good *Diadia'* (liberal official patron or literally: uncle) as they had done in the sixties, and begin to 'take the business of publishing daring works into their own hands'. The more radical wing of the creative intelligentsia has taken direct aim on the entrenched Stalinist camarilla networks which compel artists to court 'influential contacts as a patent on
future infallibility and impunity’. A first modest step in breaching this formidable patronage system may be the recent establishment of a small independent co-operative press named Vest (literally News but probably an erudite pun on Vest or Westerly Wind) which is being financed by a group of veteran liberal authors including Vasil Bykov, Fazil Iskander and Bulat Okudzhava. The young writers running the co-op intend to concentrate their energies on the publication of officially neglected classics, the works of fledgling authors deemed too outré by the state press, and possibly most significant, a ‘historical-literary’ genre aimed at restoring the political memory of the country. The relationship between Vest and the state censorship organs has not yet been spelled out in detail but its founders claim that it will operate ‘on social principles based on complete trust’ which strongly indicates that this new press will not be subject to pre-publication censorship. Veniamin Kaverin, a Soviet literary patriarch and co-founder, was bold enough to draw the transparent parallels between this experimental venture and the diverse Soviet publishing scene of the twenties. Left unsaid but implicit in his celebration of this golden age of Soviet literary endeavour was the fact that the cultural sphere of the NEP was governed by Bukharin’s libertarian maxim: De gustibus non est disputandum.

The chief ideologist was forced to grope for a possibly non-existent middle ground when he instructed a conference of historians to avoid portraying the Soviet past as a ‘chain of unmitigated errors and disappointments’, while also refraining from applying ‘cosmetics’ to tragic events. The editor of Pravda likewise warned the intelligentsia against ‘biting at the Western bait’ of a thoroughgoing discussion of Stalinism. However this patent official ambivalence has already facilitated the re-habilitation of Pavel Volobuev, the chief victim of the intellectual pogroms inflicted upon innovative Soviet historians in the early seventies. Volobuev was returned to good odour with the publication of a March 1987 Pravda essay calling on the nation to resume the long march towards the completion of a democratic revolution which had become sidetracked after October 1964.

In perhaps the most sensational document of the Gorbachev era published to date, the director of the Historical Archives Institute delivered a damning bill of indictment against a Soviet historical profession which allowed itself to be degraded to a caste of ‘priests repeating catechetical truths’. *Iurii Afanasiev called for the immediate opening of sealed Soviet archives on the NEP and the Khrushchev era. He reasoned that there was no other way to gain the depth of analysis needed to explore the alternative ‘models of socialism’ ground under by orthodox historiography, and chart a new course of development for the contemporary

* See below.
Soviet Union. At first, Afanasiev resorted to the conventional euphemisms in noting how a ‘vacuum’ of substantive historiography had nurtured widespread sympathy for 'reactionary figures' like Nicolas I. These gaps in the historical record were responsible for fostering a 'replacement of a class and even a democratic approach' to politics among some elite strata yearning vaguely for a Russophile renaissance. Afanasiev recommended the publication of Stalin's works previously unreleased as the best means of dispelling a pervasive nostalgia bred by ignorance for an illusory authoritarian golden age and a Vozbózd crowned by the popular media with a 'halo of wisdom and might'. Afanasiev would later dispense with euphemism in making an unprecedented public plea to put the 'study of the complex problems associated with the cult of Stalin on a business-like foundation', and ridiculed practicing specialists on this period for retreating beyond even the superficial guidelines set down at the XXth Congress. Coming on the heels of the rehabilitation of party democrats like Volobuev and Len Karpinskii, these remarks may anticipate the imminent rehabilitation of Roy Medvedev and his classic *Let History Judge* which would be a major benchmark of the depth of reform in this field.

Afanasiev also went beyond oblique references and actually named victims and victimisers in the many purges conducted to expunge 'deviations from the norm' out of the pages of Soviet historiography, and the brazen manner in which these inquisitors from the Stalinist 'Short Course' school had later appropriated the novel ideas of those whose careers they had broken. He described in detail how historical journals were 'monopolized' by conservatives conditioned to respond to 'cues from above' and suppress controversial ideas. The archive director sarcastically argued the need to establish immediately a 'fearless' journal on party history because the playwright, Mikhail Shatrov, was being shamelessly overburdened. The reluctance of Soviet historians to avail themselves of the greater measure of intellectual freedom forced the liberal author to take the initiative in disseminating previously suppressed historical information like Lenin's *Testament* or the April 1985 campaign within the Central Committee to pre-empt the election of Gorbachev by putting forward the candidacy of Viktor Grishin, then Moscow party chief and aspiring Neo-Stalinist 'strongman'.

Afanasiev stressed the linkage between the renewal of Soviet historiography and the democratisation of the entire political realm when he reminded his readership that Lenin's masterwork was *State and Revolution* not *Bureaucracy and Revolution*, and that Lenin equated the triumph of a 'bureaucratic state' with the 'failure of the revolution'. Afanasiev is the first to attempt to excavate the notion of the commune state, and employ it as a critical weapon against the power structure identified by Stalin as integrally socialist. This 'rediscovery' of the commune state is potentially
the most radical redefinition of orthodox Leninism to date because it legitimates the demand for a counter-communism based upon localised co-operatives and direct producer democracy. At the June plenum, Gorbachev endorsed this now commonplace radical demand to mine the experience of the Paris Commune for ideas which would assist the reformers in their struggle against bureaucratism. The commune state had been claimed as the constitutional foundation of the Soviet Republic before the 1936 Stalin Constitution consigned this self-management model to revisionist oblivion. The invocation of the commune imagery does not suggest any intention literally to impose the political structures of an 1871 workers’ ‘revolution against the state’ on a twentieth century industrial society with a highly specialised social division of labour. But the resurrection of these long suppressed ideas does indicate that the reformers, and apparently Gorbachev, share Marx’s concern with developing institutional mechanisms which will safeguard civil society against a state bureaucracy with a penchant to usurp public authority for its own corporate aggrandisement. The reformers are trying to give a new democratic content to the conventional Soviet concept of socialism by advocating the updated application of such popularly empowering commune political forms as universal elections at every level of the state; direct democratic institutions and producer democracy to supplement representative democracy; regular rotation and the immediate recall of all elected officials; an independent judiciary; community control of the means of coercion; and an end to sinecurist political privileges through the establishment of a workman’s wage scale.

Afanasiev let it be known that Volobuev was one of the few at the March 1987 historians conference openly to criticise the conservative stranglehold on the administrative levers of power within the profession and the hypocritical lip-service paid by the Right to reform. But instead of counselling restraint, he demanded an immediate ‘polarisation’ of the warring camps within an organisation where reaction was so deeply entrenched and the injection of ‘fresh forces’ so urgently needed. Up until now, the change in the Soviet leadership has had no noticeable impact on a historical profession whose liberal wing caught much of the brunt of the Brezhnevite retrenchment. But the breadth and ferocity of the Afanasiev polemic may signal the readiness of reform historians to force a decisive confrontation as the only means of dismantling the Stalinist Old Boy network, and democratising the profession.

By the end of 1986, the drive for the devolution of administrative authority had gone so far in some professional spheres that a leading reform dramatist could make the claim that the newly established theatre union was an ‘equal partner with the cultural organs’ and stage troupes were no longer the helpless pawns of state censors. 

Literary reformers like Valentin Rasputin frankly acknowledge that they anticipate a long
and arduous 'civil war' with conservatives in their own unions and in the state apparatus. However they also emphasise that the cultural Right has been stripped of the official mandate which empowered it to police dissent within the artistic intelligentsia with such devastating and devitalising effectiveness over the past two decades. The reformers across the board are directing their energies into institutionalising this abrupt and drastic shift in the balance of forces within their ranks through the formation of truly representative professional groups, and the election of strong-willed iconoclasts to key posts in the cultural hierarchy.

The advent of the Gorbachev era has returned the Shestidesiatniki (Sixties-People or liberal reformers of the Khrushchev years) from the political margins to the centres of power but they have come back fortified by the experience of their earlier defeat. The combination of organisational coups de main and an unrelenting libertarian ideological campaign by the cultural intelligentsia attests to its firm conviction that the consolidation of creative freedom depends far less on the goodwill of prolectors in the apparatus than the capacities of these groups for autonomous self-organisation and the acquisition of sufficient leverage to negotiate a radically new modus vivendi with the state.

Reformers no longer have any compunctions about debunking a monolithic Stalinist organisational dogma when they ascribe the various ills of Soviet society to the 'symbiosis' of professional groups with their associated state agency, and recommended a 'technical pluralism' as an antidote. Both claims would have been heresy only a few years before. Even the boldest progressives still preface their critiques with a re-affirmation of the political primacy of the party but they guardedly add that, 'being the ruling party, the CPSU does not substitute itself for other organizations entering into the political system of socialism but only acts through them'. This means that political power is not reducible to state power because it encompasses many other social institutions which perform functions essential to the reproduction of the social system. This studied metaphysic translates practically into a recognition of the pluralist nature of Soviet society and the need to establish regularised political mediations which do not assume an automatic identity of interests between the party-state and autonomous social groups. This broader interpretation of the political system signals a desire on the part of some Soviet elite strata to go beyond the unofficial toleration of the existence of pressure groups, and afford them a recognised and guaranteed place in the political process of a mature socialist society.

3. Gorbachev's New Deal
The broad lines of the Gorbachev reform programme are only now becoming clear. The reform government is seeking to engineer an institutional transition from the ineffectual consultative corporatism of
the Brezhnev era to a more decentralised polyarchical corporatist order, where the privileged beneficiaries will be made to shoulder the ultimate burden for their group performance through a greater exposure to competitive market discipline, and internal direct democratic accountability in exchange for the state delegation of power subsidies within specified limits to interest groups. The Gorbachev prescription assumes that the main cause of the organisational sclerosis of the early eighties was the absence of a structured pluralist stimulus which would spur officials to manage boldly and efficiently. A critical academician may have expressed the frustrations of the current leadership when he complained that within the present administrative framework, 'we sow turnips but reap weeds', because the authoritarian environment into which qualified and decent individuals were thrust was structurally conducive to the personal corruption of cadres on a massive scale. The Gorbachev braintrust appears intent on scaling back significantly an insulated state bureaucracy, which at best produces officious 'knights of the red tape', thereby opening a political space for greater reliance on the spontaneous production logic of a more open competitive administrative system in which the 'economy will mould cadres who will be worthy of the name'.

At the January 1987 plenum, Gorbachev went beyond Khrushchev's concern with turnover quotas and maximum tenure to challenge the basic principles of the system in calling for secret ballots and competitive elections in both the political and industrial spheres. Applying these new organisational tenets in practice, a team of leading sociologists made `direct democracy', in the form of plant-wide elections of the administrative hierarchy, the essential precondition for the granting of greater enterprise autonomy. Industrial democracy is presented as the only reliable means of ensuring that factory managers with much broader authority will act in accordance with a collective economic rationality rather than pursue a parochial self-aggrandising course. A manager with a solid electoral constituency should also be better able to defend enterprise rights and interests against the intervention of superior state instances used to dealing summarily with subordinate factory heads, who are generally parachuted in and lack deep roots in their collective. While Gorbachev has at least acknowledged Marx's moral democratic vision, he placed far greater practical emphasis on a Weberian plebiscitary conception of democracy as the best means of selecting authoritative leaders in the persons of 'restructuring commissars', who could ask more of their workforce in terms of both quantity and quality by being directly accountable to them.

Detailed accounts of the first enterprise elections reveal that the candidates appear to be indistinguishable chips hewn from the same technocratic block. One worker wrote to suggest that rival candidates should include a more distinct snapshot and a more detailed biography in
their campaign material so that voters would not go on labouring under the misapprehension that a pair of twins were always running against each other.' The preliminary discussion remains confined to personal generalities rather than programmatic specifics, and collective decisions must be ratified by a higher party instance with the right to nullify any election outcome that it finds disagreeable. Nevertheless, these fledgling reforms cannot be written off as just another propaganda exercise. Journalists make a point of airing frank worker scepticism about the feasibility of industrial democracy given their first-hand knowledge of management hostility. Neither have they shied away from exposing the schemes of directors to fix the results of elections in advance because they loathed being forced to surrender any of their autocratic prerogatives to what they perceived as 'unruly and incomprehensible worker masses', transformed by representative elections into a 'strong organized opposition'. The press has also given great play to the success of producer collectives in cashiering particularly corrupt or arrogant officials, and the spontaneous emergence of grassroots 'red corners' within enterprises willing to defy an obstructionist Nachalstvo (Authoritarian Management) at the risk of being fired (which they often are) and rally their workmates to assert the full self-management rights granted to them under the new Gorbachev legislation. In an especially dramatic affirmation of the need for greater political pluralism, Gorbachev pressed the normally somnolent Soviet trade union movement to democratise its organisation, and assume the role of a 'counterweight to the technocratic impulse in the economy' emanating from the managerial strata. The General Secretary further startled the assembled delegates to the February Trades Union Congress by omitting the standard ritual reference to industrial unions as the subordinate 'loyal assistant' of the party-state, and addressed them implicitly as partners. Gorbachev has placed himself squarely on the side of radical elements within the power elite who argue that the one-sided Stalinist notion of trade unions as compliant 'transmission belts' no longer corresponds to the needs of a modern industrial society, and they must now graduate into the schools of self-management that Lenin had originally envisaged. Soviet conservatives have been sounding the alarm about pluralism and democratisation triggering an outburst of popular democratic distemper as in Czechoslovakia twenty years ago. But the Left is quick to cite the more recent and menacing Polish experience as a solemn warning that a failure to introduce meaningful democratic reform will lead in the end to 'extreme measures on a different scale' originating from below. The Gorbachev reform movement is in many ways the bastard offspring of Solidarnosc because the spectacle of a working class rebellion on its own borders struck the fear of Marx into the heart of a complacent ruling class; badly discredited a Neo-Stalinist hard Right prone to run roughshod over social needs; and helped clear the way to the ascendancy
RECASTING THE SOVIET STATE

Whatever the quality of Soviet industrial democracy at this early stage, published reports make a point of reminding the winner in enterprise elections that the loser 'still remains in reserve as a fully worthy candidate', and no reprisals should be meted out against him and his supporters. Gorbachev and his allies make no secret of the fact that their main concern is to mobilise the vast reserves of productivity sloughed over by a hyper-centralised Glavkizm, and the only way of accomplishing this is through the devolution of administrative authority to local agencies made to pay materially for continued inefficiency. Whether willingly or not, the new leadership has accepted the need for a greater measure of industrial democracy that will 'transform apparatchiki into administrators' through the repoliticisation of production relations with all its imponderable consequences. At the heart of the reform strategy is a political renewal accomplished through the replacement of a stalemated organisational monism with an institutional pluralism based on the interplay of counter-vailing and mutually impelling corporatist groups.

Gorbachev has not flinched from using the term 'revolutionary' to describe the regime's search for an institutional arrangement that would facilitate the 'efficient use of this very same power of the workers and peasants for the passage of socialism to a new stage'. He has dramatically parted company with conservatives who seek to refine the 'old system... and shore up a decrepit edifice' as one radical described the Brezhnevian project. In the past two years, the centre of Soviet politics has shifted so far to the Left that the economic reform proposals of B. Kurashvili which once seemed so outlandishly maximalist, have now been assimilated into the mainstream of elite debate. This is not the place to do justice to the subtlety of Kurashvili's diagnosis but he essentially concludes that the full production potential of 'Real Socialism' can only be harnessed through a 'decentralized reflexive or stimulating administrative system... and economic self-regualtion'. The reform economist used these obligatory circumlocutions to advocate a radical deconcentration and extensive marketisation of the Soviet economy on the foundation of indicative strategic planning by a consolidated central authority limiting its purview to setting macroeconomic policy. These proposals are nothing short of revolutionary in the historical context of a 'rigidly centralized and immutable command administrative system' which has weathered repeated reform attempts virtually unscathed for the past half-century. With varying degrees of candour, Soviet reformers are converging on this restructuring model of a decentralised institutional pluralism which promises to pull the economy out of a perennial bureaucratic gridlock, and impart the initial momentum required to launch a self-sustaining longterm intensive growth cycle.

Gorbachev's speech to the June Plenum may mark the historical water-

of a liberalising party of reform within the CPSU.
shed where reformist good intentions began to be translated into concrete policies which openly challenged the most inveterate taboos of the Conservatives against decentralisation, marketisation, co-operative self-management, horizontal ties between enterprises, price reform, and a liberalising redefinition of democratic centralism. The General Secretary cited the litany of 'abuses and crimes' which have come to light in recent years as the most damning indictment of the existing administrative system while detailing in the harshest terms its monumental inefficiency and subjugation to 'departmental and parochial interests'. Gorbachev endorsed the radical Kurashvili thesis that the command planning structures of the thirties had come into irreconcilable conflict with the 'conditions and demands of economic development'. He urged the Right to come to terms with the fact that the 'time when administration was reduced to orders, bans, and appeals is gone forever' because the recession of the past decade has proved these to be 'simply ineffective'. In its place, Gorbachev called for the establishment of a 'mighty system of motivators and stimuli which will inspire all workers to fully disclose their capabilities, work productively, and employ production resources more efficiently'.

With this sweeping rejection of the administrative status quo, Gorbachev has accepted the fundamental radical premise that the production forces of the Soviet economy have long ago outgrown their formative Stalinist matrix, and are now being throttled by it. Gorbachev concluded his speech to the plenum by reiterating what he had stated a number of times that 'too much time has been lost for reform', and he wanted the rudiments of a new 'anti-expenditure economic mechanism' in place by the end of the current Five-Year-Plan. The General Secretary has apparently accepted the arguments of the more radical economists that reforms must be implemented rapidly in a cluster of co-ordinated measures to minimise homeostatic organisational reflexes towards re-centralisation and the possibility of a conservative backlash. The radicals are seeking the introduction of a system of largely indicative parametric planning where the central authorities devolve much of their control over operational detail and disposal of the enterprise surplus in exchange for a recognition by managers and the workforce that the state will from now on be far more selective in its granting of subsidies to unprofitable firms and will accept the bankruptcy of inefficient concerns. This anti-expenditure economic mechanism will be predicated on a system of increasingly market-oriented competition which will receive an additional stimulus to efficiency and innovation by being opened to the competitive pressures of the world market. The distended developmental state of the Stalin epoch must be rapidly restructured to meet the challenge of a second industrial revolution which demands the optimal harnessing of intensive growth factors, the regime of accumulation must be reapportioned to support new growth sectors at the expense of the basic
industries, and the mode of regulation must be reoriented to seek the maximisation of exchange values. The economic programme outlined at the June Plenum is a comprehensive strategy for overturning the established extensive regime of accumulation and the directive mode of regulation which steered it for over fifty years. If carried through to completion, the Gorbachev reforms would be comparable in their historical significance to the Keynesian revolution of the thirties and forties which established counter-cyclical spending and stabilising state intervention into the political economy of advanced Western capitalisms.

At this point, proposals under debate for carrying out this restructuring New Deal range all the way from the devolution of microeconomic responsibility to large production associations on the East German model to calls for the introduction of a 'planned socialist market' in the image of the Hungarian New Economic Mechanism." The final institutional lineaments of this first round of the reform struggle will be arbitrated through an internal power elite debate whose final outcome still remains problematic. But it seems safe to infer that this first adumbration of the reform polity will incorporate some specifically Soviet synthesis of rationalised deconcentration, marketised indicative planning, and a diluted form of workers' self-management.

Aganbegian cited the complete devolution of administrative authority to stage collectives as a 'new interesting model applicable not just to theatres'. The curbing of state intervention in the cultural sphere was presented as a trial run for the inevitable 'transition from command methods to economic regulation'. Gorbachev's economic adviser complained that innovation was being stifled in all spheres by the fiat of petty bureaucrats and predicted that the decentralised 'emancipation of initiative' from state constraints will allow 'diversity to reign where there now prevails organizational—administrative monotony'. The radical theatre experiment is obviously a stalking horse for industrial devolution where market forces and direct democracy will be relied upon to spur technological innovation presently inhibited by a hypercentralised political system. Aganbegian has usually been numbered among the more technocratically minded reformers, but his recent writings reflect a growing consensus within the leadership that only a greater measure of enterprise democracy will permit greater effective central control over the extremities of the Soviet economy.

As Aganbegian anticipated, the Soviet theatre is serving as a laboratory for the broader reform process, and the seemingly incongruous intervention of an economist into the cultural debate is explained by the fact that the democratisation of the stage industry has become the first major flashpoint of the struggle for political change. The social conflict embodied in the first phase of the restructuring was dramatically played out within the stage collective of the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT), the pinnacle of
the Soviet theatre industry with a lavish budget and a lucrative income and perks for its artistic company. MAT epitomises the 'principle of strict hierarchy' which has governed the operation of the Soviet theatre industry since the thirties. The innovative director of MAT, O. Efremov, is now seeking to make good his long-held promise that this stratified `Carthage' of hypertrophied prestige theatres and straitened basement troupes must be destroyed, and the prevalent 'pompous gigantomania' made to give way to the deconcentration of the stage business into a multiform array of smaller theatres. Efremov proposed to his stage collective that MAT be subdivided into two separate companies within the same institution with the establishment of a second troupe performing an avant-garde repertoire, and giving younger actors the opportunity to break through an entrenched veteran star system into leading roles.

Efremov's democratisation plan provoked fierce controversy within the MAT company, and was narrowly voted down in a November referendum which revealed the existence of two rival blocs of actors almost equal in size and supporting diametrically opposite views. To the dismay of the reformers, the majority of the company refused to risk the surety of their established privileges on a speculative artistic experiment which could conceivably undermine the official esteem and financial solvency of MAT. A vehement reform opponent was quoted in private as stating that he was only concerned with 'hanging on until I get my pension'. The bulk of Efremov's support came from liberal kindred spirits and the younger generation of actors. The referendum debate featured free-wheeling uninhibited debate, and alleged backstairs bribery and intimidation on the part of the conservatives to assemble their majority.

The MAT controversy may offer a political microcosm of the reform process within other institutions which have been the chief beneficiaries of the Brezhnevian social contract. The Gorbachev policy of cultural non-intervention has the unspoken aim of granting more free space to talented innovators and enabling them to come to the head of their respective professional associations in a comprehensive renewal of a jaded Soviet art world. The Efremov reorganisational venture typifies this new policy of coupling greater institutional autonomy and creative discretion with a new competitive stimulus and the imposition of risk. These measures are here designed to remedy a drastic decline in theatre attendance brought on by public dissatisfaction with a stale and predictable fare.

The overall reform campaign to inject a pluralist element into state-society relations will surely encounter serious opposition from vested interests, and may even be defeated in the first rounds. Reformers across the board will run up against this unholy alliance of state officials resisting the 'loss of control over the theatre process', and stage workers reluctant to 'assume responsibility' and relinquish the advantages of their old 'comfortable' dependence. But as was evident from the MAT controversy,
Brezhnevan immobilism has also bred a sizeable contingent of Semidesiatniki (1970s-People), restive insurgents at all levels of the apparatus who have been politicised by years of a chilling creative dormancy and stalled careers. When asked how he would deal with this reversal, Efremov expressed the confidence that 'time is now working for us and not against us'.

Another theatre radical may have revealed the source of Efremov's optimism when she declared that the 'ice has begun to break', and the long deferred 'process of the change of generations' was at last underway. She dismissed the significance of the recent defeat with the sarcastic remark that one cannot expect the collectives of prestige theatres to voluntarily 'repudiate the accumulated privileges of high rank even if these are not always earned through an individual's golden stock of talent'. In a bold display of public militancy now becoming increasingly commonplace, the theatre radical asserted that a 'movement from below has begun' which will proceed to 'pull down the petrified hierarchical pyramid and advance beyond the framework of fraudulent institutions towards a space of the vital democratic development of the stage'. The real story of the MAT controversy may not be the defeat of the radical restructuring proposal but how close the project came to success in this first attempt to shake off the mortmain of Brezhnevanism. Theatre reformers emerged from the skirmish reassured that in league with supportive central officials like Boris Elsin (Moscow party chief), they will soon wear down conservative obstructionists by appealing to the self-interest and idealism of the large community of losers under the old regime. The ultimate aim of this campaign is to mobilise an energised majoritarian coalition of visionary Shestidesiatniki and frustrated Semidesiatniki.

As a result of a joint agreement between the Ministry of Culture and the theatre union, Efremov's reorganisation proposal was approved in mid-April over the majority vote of the collective, and the MAT troupe split into two autonomous companies, each with its own control over repertoire, dramatists, directors, and staff questions. The leaders of the theatre union accused the obdurate majority of the old collective of being an unrepresentative group spawned artificially by the 'patronage' of the state cultural organs, larded with undeserved privileges, and shielded from public criticism. The result was the 'gradual enfeeblement' of MAT as a creative institution and the spread of a parasitic psychology within the collective. Efremov brushed aside suggestions that the bifurcation was hasty, and claimed that the 'incremental principle' governing theatre operations over the past seventeen years, had only mired MAT deeper into an artistic malaise. The union heads were even more emphatic in stating that 'palliative measures and minor correctives' could not remedy the organisational rot that was undermining MAT, and only a 'radical reform of the structure' could reverse the disease.
The issuance of this joint decree was preceded by a diligent lobbying campaign on the part of both the theatre reformers and conservatives. For example, a theatre radical published an article during early March in which he lashed the Ministry of Culture for dragging its feet at the central and local levels in granting autonomy to stage collectives. Theatre conservatives responded by taking the aesthetic high road in accusing the reformers of trying to turn the theatre into a 'commercial enterprise', courting 'anarchy' and a 'dictatorship of mediocrity' through the introduction of the elective principle, and refusing to recognise that 'not a few areas' of social activity are resistant to democratisation. Later that month, Ligachev threw his considerable weight behind the conservatives in charging some radical reformers with trying to 'diminish the leading role of state administration in the culture sphere'. Ligachev has consistently tried to breathe new life into a somnolent cultural realm while forestalling any erosion of the primacy of state supervision by those elements of the artistic intelligentsia with a hidden democratic agenda. The chief regime ideologist conspicuously endorsed the conservative position that cultural reform was proceeding too precipitously. This can variously be interpreted as either genuine concern that the restructuring process was slipping out of control or the desperate sandbagging of a Right-Wing forced onto the defensive.

At the beginning of April, Aleksandr Iakovlev (head of the Central Committee propaganda department) made a speech on cultural affairs in which he scorned any notion of slackening the pace of reform, and pressed that the 'machinery of retardation established over the years, must be smashed without any hesitation'. The approval of Efremov's radical reorganisational proposal came shortly after Iakovlev delivered his militant brief on cultural matters. The timing indicates that the Fabian wing of the reform movement has suffered a major defeat in this round of the ongoing struggle within the power elite to determine the content and tempo of restructuring. The dismantling of this most notorious 'stone theatre' carries implications that extend far beyond a major victory for the forces of cultural liberalisation. This overriding of overt conservative opposition to the Efremov experiment indicates both the growing strength and coherence of the reform tendency within the highest reaches of the leadership, and an apparent determination to apply a similar form of pluralist decentralisation to other spheres, including the economy.

A general strategy for a democratisation from below similar to that employed in the theatre was mapped out a few years ago by a sociologist who advised elite reformers to take account of the natural existence of a 'dual power' of formal and informal groups within every large organisation. He suggested that these numerous progressively inclined informal groups could be pitted by an adroit reformist leadership against 'apparatus bureaucratism' if it was willing to run the risks entailed in such a confrontation. Unlike any of its predecessors, the Gorbachev administration
appears willing to raise the stakes of its political gamble in sponsoring a graduated organisational mobilisation from below to isolate a recalcitrant Right, and this willingness represents a qualitatively new development on the Soviet political scene.

Gorbachev's speech to the January plenum was accompanied by the publication of a series of articles on Lenin's Testament and the de facto rehabilitation of Bukharin who was the chief ideological architect of the NEP. LENIN's Testament was in fact the inadequate response of a dying man to the probably insoluble political dilemmas facing a disoriented post-revolutionary government. However superficial Lenin's analysis may seem in retrospect, a reading of these documents leaves no doubt that he was desperately casting about for a strategy to combat a bureaucratic pathology that would be later consecrated into raison d'etat by Stalin and the coalition of party factions which rallied to the support of his crisis programme in the late twenties.

The timing of this 'rediscovery' of Lenin's Testament indicates that the reform coalition perceives itself to be in a historical situation comparable to that of the Bolshevik Party on the eve of the NEP when the best of their ideological forebears attempted to move the country beyond the authoritarian regime of War Communism. This cultivation of the libertarian image of Lenin along with the resurrection of the polemical vocabulary of the XXth Congress, all testify to the desire of the reformers to anchor a radical political departure in the best traditions of Soviet history. An anti-Stalinist playwright was free to outline the predicament of the eighties more graphically in an interview with a Polish journalist when he warned that the Soviet Union now finds itself at a crossroads between liberalisation and 'even more constraints, more imposed rather than consciously accepted discipline that all adds up to the path along which Joseph Vissarionovich once showed the way'. The alternative to Neo-Stalinism is a new economic growth strategy and thoroughgoing democratisation comparable in the scale of their intricacy and urgency to the post-war reconversion of the NEP.

Conclusion
Gorbachev recently announced that he would leave the state censorship organs and the new theatre union to their own devices in working out the specifics of the 'mechanism of interaction' between themselves. In the Soviet organisational context, this executive profession of non-intervention translates practically into neutrality in favour of a decentralised self-management for increasingly militant theatre artists intent on rolling back the boundaries of official Zapretomania (Banning-mania). With characteristic understatement, Gorbachev thus sanctioned the autonomist strivings of professional groups in their wars of position with state agencies, and licensed supportive politicians to come to their assistance in the event
that restructuring is stymied. The margin of manoeuvre for social groups is still limited by the standards of Western societies in prosperous times, and the fundamental power relations of the Soviet political system have not yet been altered. But there can be no denying the facts that over the past year, venerable Stalinist taboos have been perhaps irreparably breached, reformist precedents firmly established, the collective consciousness of all classes jolted out of a self-protective lassitude, and the overall political climate ventilated with a critical wind that still seems to be rising.

For the first time since the twenties, the hegemonic fraction of the Soviet ruling class perceives its own corporate political objectives to be best served by a phased administrative decentralisation and a carefully calibrated limited democratisation of the economy. This devolution of microeconomic responsibility is designed primarily to restore the seriously eroded strategic steering capacity of the executive apparatus. Decentralisation should also bolster the campaign of the Gorbachev government gradually to broaden and professionalise the basis of selection of the power elite while refining the existing system of vertically-oriented oligarchical consultation into a polyarchical collaboration. The ultimate object appears to be the consolidation of a corporate pluralist economy on a new economic axis where indicative planning, a regulated 'socialist market', and greater integration into a competitive international division of labour, are used to impose an optimalist production rationality and discipline on more autonomous industrial units and professional associations. The Gorbachev government demonstrates a genuine commitment to a political liberalisation which concedes broader Rechtsstaat guarantees to individuals and groups in the wake of administrative deconcentration because these will become the essential lubricant for the smooth introduction and operation of the ongoing 'qualitative changes in the system of relations between the administrative organs and society'.

Gorbachev has often promised that his revolutionary restructuring will emancipate the 'enormous intellectual potential' penned up and squandered by authoritarian administrative practices. The new government has endorsed the radical diagnosis that the political sclerosis of the late Brezhnev era resulted from the unwillingness of the regime to permit that broader range of regularised public imput participation needed to resolve equitably the ordinary social conflict which arises in all advanced industrial societies. The defeat of the democratisation process initiated at the XXth Congress set into motion a vicious circle of social conflict being settled by official fiat which fostered both public apathy and frustration with a ritualised politics. The circuit was closed when the resulting popular alienation and withdrawal yielded even greater space to unchecked apparatus intervention in the political arena. An iconoclastic literary critic gave some indication of elite foreboding before this combustible public estrangement when reviewing Rasputin's latest novel...
The land is not silent. The land does not approve. The silence of the land is menacing, as threatening as the sullen silence of the people at the conclusion of Pushkin’s drama Boris Godunov. . . Silence can be concealed anger and the smouldering spontaneous force of a fire that will scorch everything if it gets out of control.

But these frank expressions of concern about the yawning gulf between the governing class and the rest of society seem largely motivated by a conviction that the Brezhnevite retrenchment has not only brought the country to the edge of an economic precipice but also politically depleted the reservoir of popular energies needed to pull the country back from a possible disaster.

Gorbachev admits that his government is only now in the first stages of 'breaking the ground and sowing the seed' of reform. 58 He obviously envisages a protracted war of position within all the institutions of Soviet society whose ultimate outcome will be decided by the end of the decade but may require as long as a generation to be fully consummated. Nevertheless the reformers have not concealed their determination to reignite the 'process of the democratisation of social life' inaugurated by the XXth Party Congress and abruptly cut short after the fall of Khrushchev. The circumspection of the General Secretary has not deterred outspoken reformers from asserting that Gorbachev's plough should be cutting right now into the crust of an intransigent 'nomenklatura circle'. The elite reformers have refused so far to be intimidated by the resistance of vested interests 'accustomed to privilege'. On the contrary, their polemics are becoming steadily more combative as for example the insistence of the editor of a major Moscow daily that a government serious about restructuring must not flinch from launching a direct populist assault on an entrenched blimpocracy 'even if it means getting into a battle'. The radical tendencies within the reform movement have already assumed an overtly anti-apparatus character in an attempt to mobilise public support against obstructionist elements within the government. This populist tendency was exemplified in the complaint of Boris Elsin (Moscow urban party chief) that the 'formal rights and obligations' of neighbourhood councils 'have been usurped by the apparatus'. The outbreak of a spontaneous street demonstration in Leningrad complete with flying pickets, sidewalk soliciting for a public petition, and a police clash, would have gone unreported in the past or at best been written off as the misguided actions of juvenile dupes manipulated by unspecified 'outsiders'. But reform journalists seized on this mass statement of opposition to the unilateral decision of the Leningrad city council to demolish historical landmarks without public hearings, as graphic proof of the latent popular animosity spawned by the 'unwillingness of apparatus officials to consider
themselves the servants of the people'. The conservative establishment has reacted angrily to the audacity of party democrats willing to identify the cause of reform with these volatile grassroots insurgencies. In particular, the stolidly orthodox main party theoretical journal editorially condemned this growing populist tendency to fight bureaucratization `under the banner of a general struggle against the officials of the state apparatus, against the nomenklatura'. A sign of rising tensions within the power elite was the decision of a conservative novelist (Iurii Bondarev) to go on the record drawing an obscene comparison between the radical proponents of Glasnost and the Nazi invaders of 1941 as 'civilized barbarians' intent on annihilating native Russian culture. The veteran of the death struggle on the Volga called upon the Right to launch a purifying 'new Stalingrad' after the tide of battle had begun to turn in their favour. Bondarev's inflammatory rhetoric is indicative of the bravado and sense of impunity which seem to pervade conservative ranks as they dig in to resist the onslaught of revolutionary restructuring and democratization through the administrative equivalent of exhausting house-to-house fighting. The radical challenge implicit in Gorbachev's demand for a modernising perevorot (break-through) has now been answered by invoking the memory of another historical turning point with compelling moral authority where Soviet armies through a war of attrition methodically transformed a desperate siege into the encirclement and rout of the aggressor.

The battle lines are now being drawn within the Soviet power elite. The conservatives are supported by established elite strata whose authority is grounded in the basic industries and the directive administrative apparatus of the traditional extensive accumulation regime. The reformers represent younger professionalised power elite strata who are bent on overturning the Brezhnevian political equilibrium. The gradual abrogation of the existing social contract is seen as a necessary preliminary to introducing an intensive growth strategy, and shifting investment from the smokestack sectors of the hi-tech branches. In defence of the infant industries of the future against the formidable production complexes of the past, a reformist government has no choice but to 'go to the people'.

All sides of the reform struggle recognise that the 'fate of restructuring is being decided right now. . . in the fields and the factories, in the heart of the people'. Grassroots activists argue that the vast army of the `hesitant' can only be won over to the party of reform by concrete examples of democratization and the repudiation of elite pretensions which have so profoundly alienated the popular base of the government. The reformers must prove to an understandably wary populace that the bridges back to a repressive past have finally been burned before they can enlist the huge numbers needed to fight a war of position. This combination of conservative resistance and public scepticism seems to be forcing
the progressive elite coalition continually to escalate its aggressive programme of democratisation to win popular confidence and keep the Right on the defensive. A qualitatively new development on the Soviet political scene has been this readiness of the Gorbachev administration to accept the risks of a dual-track strategy aptly described by a worker as a campaign to wear down domestic conservatism 'between the hammer of decisive actions from above and the anvil of initiative and exacting supervision from below'.

If Gorbachev and his braintrust are liberals, then they have set themselves the precarious task of first repoliticising Soviet society and later attempting to re-establish it on a new foundation of class domination. At the very least, such a policy opens the political terrain to collective action by radicals and industrial democrats which the dominant wing of the reform movement is presently scrambling to contain. Political liberalisation can and quite probably will come fitfully from above over the next decade in exchange for popular support of a techno-administrative Perestroika. But a genuine Obnovlenie or democratising socialist renewal can only come from below as Marx attested when he lectured statolatrous Lassalleans in 1879 that socialism must become the self-emancipation of the working people or it simply will never be.

The great imponderable in the current reform equation is the political capacity of a vast and heterogeneous Soviet working class which would have the greatest stake in pushing this historical process to the limits of the possible. State egalitarian preachings seem to have made a more pronounced impact at the level of popular consciousness than actual government practice because Soviet workers have consistently displayed a strong productivist mentality in sociological surveys and a dogged collective resistance to official efforts to introduce divisive broader wage differentials. The presence of militant industrial democrats within the reform camp combined with an apparent shopfloor receptiveness to a platform of workers' control, creates the potential for the emergence of a political alliance seeking to revolutionise the established attenuated forms of production participation into a self-management socialism constituted authoritatively from below. The Soviet press has already carried expressions of worker concern about liberal labour disciplining plans to roll back welfare state entitlements and permit an officially acceptable level of unemployment, reports of shopfloor revolts against management efforts to continue imposing the usual 'bootlickers and brownnosers' as trade union representatives, and the details of a wildcat strike by machinists in a Moscow factory against chronically unsafe working conditions which finally resulted in the serious injury of a workmate. The Soviet working class may never be a deus ex machina, but realism does not preclude inquiry into its potentials along with its limitations as an equally salutary antidote to the fixation of mainstream
Sovietology on the vagaries of elite politics.

A conservative Czech delegate to the Soviet trade union congress warned his fraternal colleagues that the administered liberalisation underway in their country, was unleashing long pent-up popular democratic energies which would propel the political situation towards another Prague Spring. There is some sociological evidence to suggest that this Stalinist survivor from the Dubcek era may have a surer grip on the social dynamic presently gathering momentum in the Soviet Union than those neo-liberal Stolypins who anticipate that a self-limiting revolution from above will conveniently arrest itself after emancipating a whole new generation of cadres from the tentacles of a bureaucratic leviathan. East European social scientists have consistently advised that the working class in statist societies is much better placed to defend its collective interests if they should be adversely affected by economic restructuring than its Western counterparts whose strategic position and historical confidence have been severely undermined by forced de-industrialisation and protracted mass unemployment. A Polish scholar cautioned that the industrial working class is 'not only the largest but also the best organised social force owing to the enormous concentration of workers in large and very large industrial plants', and these political circumstances ensure that 'any sort of unrest within this social force in a large work place can have... far greater consequences than strikes in capitalist countries'.

Neo-liberal economists now in the ascendancy attribute the frequently noted but perfunctorily analysed apathy of the Soviet working class to the absence of sharply differentiated material incentives, restricted opportunities for individual consumption, and the lack of managerial disciplinary leverage in a full-employment economy. Others trace the root of this industrial malaise to surveys revealing that only 15-25 per cent of the workforce really believe that they have an effective voice in administration despite the many formal conduits for input. These industrial democrats blame an authoritarian work regimen for pervasive shopfloor alienation at a time when the political capacity of the working class has far outstripped its actual power in the production process. A recent major survey of factory workers revealed that no more than 7 per cent of the respondents agreed with the 'minimalist' principle that workers should not interfere at all with management. Conversely 20 per cent adopted a maximalist self-management principle that workers should have the right to decide directly the majority of administrative questions. Industrial polling conducted over the past two decades has uniformly revealed a very strong productivist mentality or work-place orientation among Soviet workers but the Yugoslav-style administrative system broached in the question has always been officially anathematised as 'anarcho-syndicalist' extremism. Despite these ideological structures, a fifth of the workers
surveyed chose to defy the pulpit, and advocate a radical socialisation of the means of production. The sociologists labelled 73 per cent of the industrial workforce as 'realists' but this was accomplished by an unusual conflation of two categories which are logically incompatible. Realists were defined as both those who agreed that participation entailed leaving the ultimate decision on all matters to management and those who believed that workers should have the final say in an unspecified number of undefined areas. The first is essentially the same autocratic consultative system which has been in place since the Khrushchev era while the second nebulous organisational principle would entail major experiments in industrial democracy. The available evidence on the political consciousness of a 92 million strong industrial and rural Soviet working class cross cut by a mosaic of wage and status hierarchies is still too fragmentary to base a definitive judgement on any count. But there is sufficient data to give pause to those who accept too readily the neo-liberal characterisation of the bulk of the Soviet working class as at best a shapeless sack of indolent besotted proletarian plebs, or at worst Stalinoid lumpen elements at the disposal of the Right. The Soviet working class has no recent history of collective struggle outside of the shopfloor micro-solidarity that has proved to be such an effective barrier against all management efforts to introduce steeper income differentials. This vital lack of organisational experience should douse any facile illusions that the proletariat will soon emerge as a promethean primal force armed and ready to cut through the convoluted knot of dilemmas facing Soviet society. But neither does the evidence preclude the possibility that a politically potential majority within the Soviet working class can eventually mature into an effective majority inside a reform coalition over the course of the next five—ten years as it is tempered by the strife-ridden crucible of economic liberalisation.

Even at this early stage of the reform process, journalists have been commenting on the rapidly escalating polarisation into 'we and they' within many industrial enterprises as managerial cadre stampede to avail themselves of the broader disciplinary powers and lucrative bonuses available under the Gorbachev reforms while production workers experience restructuring mainly as a comprehensive speed-up. Others warn that the recently promulgated self-management legislation struck an extremely responsive chord on the factory shopfloor, and continued management stonewalling against relinquishing any of its baronial authority, was inviting serious trouble. There is also testimony that workers are now openly daring to make the logical connection between their own individual impotence and the larger political context as in a letter where a reader insisted that the essence of bureaucratism is not red tape or formalism as the liberals claim but the 'embezzlement of power from the people'. The first glimmerings of a broader political strategy were suggested
in a letter from a worker to a widely read cultural journal where he called for a 'union of the working class and the humanist intelligentsia' to aid each other in the reform struggle instead of continuing to 'face one another across a road while waiting for a bureaucrat's shout'. This growing sense of an oppositionist common cause was echoed by a major novelist who defined the intelligentsia as a 'spiritual category' rather than a status group denoted by a university degree of superficial manners because he had encountered many 'unintellectuals among scholars, even major scholars, and knew personally splendid intellectuals among manual labourers' distinguished by their innate sense of decency and spiritual independence. At this point, there is no way of knowing whether these scattered declarations in Soviet newspapers are the representative first stirrings of a groundswell of democratising sentiment or stray fringe voices from the underground which will never find a sympathetic mass audience. But the fact that such opinions are even in the wind not to mention being granted a public hearing, is cause in itself to speculate on the real possibility of the coalescence of an historic bloc which can finally move the Soviet Union beyond the shadow of Stalinism.

Burlatskii, like other liberal reformers, may be expressing the generally confident mood of the reform elites when he makes the argument that the emergence of an exemplary polished statesman as General Secretary is no political fluke. The liberal social scientist argues that the Gorbachev ascendancy should be seen in macrosociological terms as the almost logical epiphenomenon of the post-war crystallisation of a well-educated and increasingly demanding society whose present political morphology virtually precludes a reasoned resort to Stalinist methods. The relentlessly increasing weight of civil society on the political process bolsters Burlatskii's confidence that 'Gorbachev will succeed where Khrushchev failed' in democratising the Soviet system. In an unprecendented admission for a modern Soviet leader, Gorbachev welcomed the fact that `life is now outstripping design' at the grassroots, and many collectives are not bothering to wait for formal enacting legislation before spontaneously introducing organisational democracy on their own initiative. It remains to be seen whether Gorbachev is a political magician who can continue to minister these social energies in precise medicinal doses, or a sorcerer's apprentice.

NOTES

The following abbreviations are used in the notes:

EKO: Ekonomika i organizatsiiia promyslennogo proizvodstva (Economics and Organization of Industrial Production)
IZ.. Izvestiia
K: Kommunist
KP: Komsomolskaia Pravda
21. On the radicalisation of the Gorbachev reform programme over the past year, see the interview with the reform economist, A. Butenko, in *L’Unita*, 7 May 1987. F. Burlatskii, *LG*, 1 October 1986. Burlatskii is a major Soviet political scientist, outspoken liberal, and had been one of Khrushchev’s ‘whiz kids’ during the early sixties.


30. IZ, 11 October 1986; S. Fedorov, 0, no. 9 (1987); P, 5 December 1986.


32. SK, 5 March 1987.

33. IZ, 29 January 1987.


41. SK, 5 March 1987; P, 31 October 1986.


47. IZ, 26 June 1987.


55. SK, 6 December 1986.


