

To achieve greater freedom, the Soviets explain, it is first necessary to concentrate power in the hands of the leadership.

# THE NEW SOVIET ELITE

BY HARRIET FAST SCOTT

**W**E ARE witnessing the formation of a new political elite." Yevgeniy Ambartsumov, an eminent Soviet historian, made that statement not long ago in reference to major political events reshaping the traditional Kremlin power structure.

At a gathering of the Communist Party's Central Committee last September, General Secretary Mikhail S. Gorbachev rammed through the appointment of supporters to the Politburo while removing some Brezhnev holdovers. Then, at a special session of the 1,500-member Supreme Soviet the next day, he took the post of President and set about revamping the government to his liking, with provision for what is supposed to be a democratically elected parliament.

Commentators have debated the long-term significance of these moves. What is undisputed, however, is that they are aimed at firmly consolidating the authority of Gorbachev—and of his allies in the reformist camp. In his analysis, Ambartsumov said as much:

"The [Gorbachev] leadership



wants to demonstrate unequivocally its intention to concentrate all power in its own hands in order to accelerate the implementation of reforms. Democratic methods are not yet sufficiently developed. People want results. Gorbachev has given a sign to the population by shouldering all responsibility himself."

Gorbachev may be, as he suggests, merely seeking new power to advance the cause of *perestroika*, his drive to restructure Soviet economic and social life in ways that provide incentive and choice for individual Soviet citizens.

Even so, Soviet intellectuals express deep concern about the possible fate of *perestroika* as the new process unfolds. Human-rights champion Andrey Sakharov, on his visit to the US, delivered a stern warning about the danger of concentration of power, even in the name of democracy. "Today it will be Mr. Gorbachev," says the Nobel Prize-winning physicist. "Tomorrow, it may be somebody else. There are no guarantees—we must be frank about this—no guarantees."

Soviet citizens are preparing to go to the polls March 26 for the first contested election of a Congress of People's Deputies. Yet, while Gorbachev has claimed that he wants to reduce Party management of industries and social organizations, Party organs are assigned a powerful role in the new setup, and local bodies face restraints.

In short, the new power structure, on close examination, does not appear to be more "democratic," in a Western sense, than the old version. Strong Party influence seems certain to continue.

### **Calls for Democracy**

The recent flurry of political change has its origins in the Extraordinary Nineteenth Party Conference convened by Gorbachev last summer in Moscow, the first gathering of its kind since a few months before the 1941 German invasion. Here, Gorbachev unveiled his blueprint for *perestroika* of the Party apparatus and the agencies of state power.

Not accidentally, the conference was preceded by official disclosures of Party abuses and excesses committed during the reign of Joseph

Stalin. This process, far from being of purely historical interest, was intended to discredit the way the Party had operated in the past and to raise—and answer—basic questions about what could be done to prevent such abuses and excesses from recurring.

One critical requirement, in Gorbachev's view, was to bring to the Party a measure of internal democracy that might serve as a check on powerful members. Candidate Politburo member Georgiy Razumovskiy, writing in the Party journal *Kommunist*, made Gorbachev's case plainly with the blunt statement that "the avant-garde role of the Communist Party in *perestroika* and renewal of society is impossible without deep democratization of internal Party life." This democratization, he emphasized, was "the key directive of the Nineteenth Party Conference."

Movement was not visible, however, until the early fall of 1988. Action began at a Plenum of the Central Committee hastily called for Friday, September 30. Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze canceled meetings in New York to hurry back to Moscow. The Minister of Defense and Chief of the General Staff were out of the country, too. In the days before the leaders met, 25,000 KGB security troops, MVD Internal Troops, and an elite Guards Division were mobilized around Moscow. The last time this occurred was in October 1964, when Premier Nikita Khrushchev was ousted.

### **"Stalin Would Be Proud"**

The Plenum was of monumental importance, though it lasted less than one hour. When it was over, startling changes had taken place, and Gorbachev was firmly in control. Robert Gates, the CIA's deputy director at that time, observed afterward that "Stalin would have been proud of the smoothly orchestrated, forty-four-minute . . . session in which people were fired, retired, demoted, and promoted with no dissent or even discussion, [all] delegates voting as one."

Abruptly pensioned off from the Politburo were full members Andrey A. Gromyko, the seventy-nine-year-old President who had served twenty-eight years as For-

eign Minister, and Mikhail Solomentsev, a senior functionary. Also removed were candidate members Petr Demichev and Vladimir Dolgikh, both Brezhnev appointees.

Then came the promotions. Vadim Medvedev, a Gorbachev ally, became a full member of the Politburo. Assuming posts as candidate members were Aleksandr V. Vlasov, the Interior Minister, and former Party secretaries Aleksandra P. Biryukova and Anatoliy I.



Lukyanov. These two also are reputed to be attuned to Gorbachev's agenda. Viktor Chebrikov, chief of the KGB, retained his Politburo seat and joined the Secretariat, but relinquished control of the USSR intelligence organization.

The top Party apparatus was reorganized in its entirety. The number of departments that previously ran the day-to-day activities of the Central Committee appears to have been cut in half. Taking the lead role in Party functions were six new Party commissions: Ideology, chaired by Medvedev; Party and Personnel, chaired by Razumovskiy; Domestic Law, chaired by Chebrikov; Social and Economic Affairs, chaired by Nikolai Slyunkov; Agriculture, chaired by Yegor Ligachev; and International Politics, chaired by Aleksandr Yakovlev.

The main goal of this change evidently is to reduce the authority of entrenched interests that once held forth in the CPSU Secretariat. All problems now are to be resolved by the commissions instead. As explained by prominent Soviet journalist Yegor Yakovlev: "The filter

provided by the Secretariat no longer exists."

The changes in Party structure have reverberated far beyond Moscow. Once the national-level CPSU was restructured, the Communist Party apparatus of each of the republics, krays, oblasts, and cities followed suit. For example, the Georgian Communist Party formed five commissions and slashed its departments from seventeen to eight.

### Local Accountability

At the local level, the main goal of the reforms will be to unify two previously independent and highly unequal posts—that of the local Communist Party secretary and that of the chairman of the local soviet, or council. Until now, the local council leader lacked authority to act, while the Party boss issued orders without regard to likely consequences. When things went wrong, the poor council chairman took the blame. Now, plans call for one person to take up both positions and for that person to be accountable for results.

According to *Pravda*, other candidates may contest the Party secretaryship itself. "This," the official Party newspaper explains, "will increasingly force the first secretaries to change their work style, to try to be accessible to the people, to show constant attention and concern for their needs and earn the confidence of the masses." Otherwise, it is implied, the voters can throw a Party Secretary out of power.

With reform of the Party launched, Gorbachev wasted no time in seeking changes in the formal system of USSR state power, which is separate and distinct from the CPSU apparatus itself. His apparent objective: Provide the population more power—or at least the illusion of power—and, in the process, give the government more legitimacy.

At the Party Conference in the summer of 1988, Gorbachev outlined the shape of a new legislative body, requiring amendments to the 1977 Brezhnev Constitution. Because of this need, Gorbachev convened an Extraordinary Session of the Supreme Soviet on October 1, 1988, the day after the dramatic CPSU Plenum. Events were orchestrated. First, Gromyko stepped

down as the President of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. Then Gorbachev was unanimously elected to replace him as head of state. Once installed as president, Gorbachev possessed formal authority to propose constitutional amendments.

The amendments were intended to produce a fresh government model, one with expanded power and more formal independence from the Party bosses. It was to be



based on a strong president chosen by a popularly elected Congress of People's Deputies. This, incidentally, might also provide Gorbachev with a power base outside the Party apparatus itself.

These proposed changes were not published until late October, leaving little more than a month for public debate before the Supreme Soviet was to ratify the changes. Estonians, in particular, bitterly complained about the short time allocated to discussion. Estonia's parliament went so far as to vote itself a right to veto decisions made in Moscow—a display of local impudence that Moscow, unsurprisingly, rejected out of hand. At the end of November, the Supreme Soviet met in regular session and adopted the constitutional amendments.

### A New Congress

At the heart of the electoral reform is the new concept of a Congress of People's Deputies. It will have 2,250 members, one-third more than the old Supreme Soviet, which it supersedes. These deputies are to be elected directly in a com-

plex system based on territorial districts, national-territorial districts, and "social organizations."

Territorial districts will be formed, much like congressional districts in the United States, to represent equal numbers of voters in the USSR. A total of 750 territorial districts will be formed, each represented by a deputy.

So-called national-territorial districts correspond to various Soviet regional subdivisions—union republics, autonomous republics, autonomous oblasts, and autonomous okrugs. A total of 750 of these national-territorial districts will be formed, each represented by a deputy. Each of the fifteen union republics will receive thirty-two deputies; each of twenty autonomous republics, eleven deputies; each of eight autonomous oblasts, five deputies; each of ten autonomous okrugs, one deputy.

The most controversial—and, to political reformers, dismaying—provision of the election scheme concerns selection of the final bloc of deputies. A total of 750 deputies—fully one-third of the new Congress—is reserved for representatives of Party-dominated "social organizations." The "social" deputies can be grouped this way:

- Three groups—the Communist Party itself, USSR trade unions, and USSR cooperative organizations—each will elect 100 deputies, for a total of 300.

- Six groups—the Young Communist Organization (Komsomol), women's groups, war and labor veterans, scientific workers, artists' unions, and other officially recognized social organizations—each will elect seventy-five deputies, for a total of 450.

These "social" deputies will be "elected" by delegates to their congresses or conferences or plenums, with each participant having one vote. The outcome of these votes will not be in doubt. The Communist Party, for example, submitted a list of 100 handpicked candidates for its rank-and-file to "elect" to the 100 seats reserved for the Party. This is expected to be near-universal practice.

Complaints are being voiced. In Latvia, authorities went so far as to pass a resolution condemning such indirect election of deputies from

social organizations. "It does not conform with the principles of democracy," the resolution states.

In fact, the Party is also likely to have a major influence on which candidates fill the remaining seats, despite the theoretical right of ordinary Soviet citizens to nominate rival candidates. The new system will offer voters only a limited degree of choice. Terms are for five years. A deputy may not serve more than two consecutive terms.

The Congress will meet once a year. At its first meeting after the March election, deputies will elect a President and a new, reconstituted Supreme Soviet by secret vote.

That Gorbachev will be elected President is a foregone conclusion. He already has stated that he expects the chairman of the Supreme Soviet also to be the Party's General Secretary. But the President's term will be for five years, and no one, not even Gorbachev, can serve more than two consecutive terms. On paper at least, the Congress will have the right to remove the President at any time by secret ballot.

### A Stronger President

The role of the President has been significantly enhanced by the new constitution. Although Brezhnev, Yuriy Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko served simultaneously as General Secretary and President, the latter office was ceremonial. Now, the Soviet President, rather than the General Secretary, will be the highest official of the Soviet state and will represent the USSR to the nation and in international relations.

Specifically, the President will supervise preparation of questions to be examined by the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet. He will submit reports to the Supreme Soviet on the state of the country, on domestic and foreign policy, and on the defense capability and security of the USSR. He will head the small, secretive, and powerful Council of Defense. He will conduct negotiations and sign international treaties.

Under the new constitutional provisions, members of a new Supreme Soviet will be elected by secret vote of the Congress. This marks a major departure from the past. Then, vot-

ing for deputies was direct, but only a single, Party-approved candidate was offered. Frequently, a prominent person was assigned to represent a district whether voters wanted him or not.

A case in point is the Kuldiga district of Latvia, which not long ago proposed recalling its deputy, Admiral Sergey G. Gorshkov, on grounds that he "is detached from the everyday problems of his electors." The voters didn't realize how detached Gorshkov really was. He had died six months earlier, and no one had bothered to inform Kuldigans about his demise.

The new Supreme Soviet, like the old, will have two chambers: the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of the Nationalities. The two chambers will be numerically equal, but each will be much smaller than the old Supreme Soviet, totaling only 542 members. There will be regular spring and fall sessions, each lasting up to four months. The new Supreme Soviet sessions will take the form of separate or joint sittings. Between sessions, there will be sittings of their permanent commissions and of the USSR Supreme Soviet committees. One-fifth of the Supreme Soviet will be renewed each year.

### Making Defense Decisions

What will the Supreme Soviet do? In this new structure, it evidently has been designated as the primary decision-making body with respect to the Armed Forces. The Supreme Soviet will form the USSR Defense Council and ratify its composition, appoint and effect changes in the supreme commands of the USSR Armed Forces, determine basic measures in defense and state security, be able to initiate mobilization, be able to proclaim a state of war in the event of armed attack on the USSR or to meet treaty obligations, decide the uses of the armed forces to meet treaty obligations to maintain security, establish military

ranks, institute orders and medals, and confer honorary titles of the USSR.

Under the former system, all this was carried out by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. Now, the Presidium is charged with handling military affairs when the Supreme Soviet is between sessions. The Presidium will be able to declare a state of martial law or emergency for the whole country or in particular areas.

Having never had a true standing body at the national level, Soviet citizens are not altogether certain how much power the new Congress and the new Supreme Soviet will have. In the past, the elegant words of the Constitution have not been matched by deeds, to say the least. Only time will tell if real power has been given to the soviets and taken away from the Communist Party.

The democratization unleashed by *perestroika* is not without serious problems. On October 7—ironically, Constitution Day in the Soviet Union—riot police in Moscow were called in to break up a protest demonstration claiming that "Partocracy is not democracy." In Leningrad, similar protests aimed at the political reforms were also dispersed. People's Front movements were spreading through the three Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Thus far, Gorbachev's economic *perestroika* has not shown any major successes. Economic progress, if it comes, can be measured—in terms of more food, better housing, quantities of export goods. The progress of political *perestroika* will be more difficult to measure. Will there be more human rights, more democracy and freedom? Or will there be increased concentration of power in the hands of one individual or a small group of like-minded individuals? Although the jury is still out, all signs point toward emergence of a new political elite to replace the old. ■

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