

7 In newspapers, radio and television broadcasts, meetings, and books – everywhere, every day, friendship with Russians is encouraged; widely propagandized are cases where Latvian girls marry Russians or Latvian youths marry Russian girls.

*Source: Saunders (ed.), Samizdat, pp. 427–8, 431–3, 434, 435.*

Several important themes emerge from these accounts. First, it should be noted that although these materials are ascribed to the 'dissident' camp, at this stage the national movements were overwhelmingly loyal, seeking change within the framework of the existing system and ideology. It was the regime's failure to draw on this source of renewal that prepared the ground for the disintegration of the Union in 1991. Environmental issues were to play a large part in the emergence of a distinctive patriotic Russian literary consciousness from the 1970s. Valentin Rasputin was concerned with the pollution of Lake Baikal, the world's largest reserve of fresh water, while a number of 'village writers' described the degradation of Russian rural life. In art, as mentioned in Plyushch's memoirs, cited above, Il'ya Glazunov took up Russian national themes in his work. As we have seen, however, it was Solzhenitsyn who almost single-handedly defined a patriotic Russian identity, not so much in opposition to communism but transcending it.

### The Interregnum – Andropov's Authoritarian Reform

The eighteen years of Brezhnev's stultifying regime finally came to an end in November 1982. The man who had masterminded the struggle against dissent as head of the KGB since 1967 now became General Secretary. In his former capacity Yuri Andropov was at least well informed about the problems facing the country and sought to devise a programme of authoritarian reform to deal with them. His health, however, declined rapidly and in February 1984 he died. He was strong enough to ensure a powerful role for the youngest member of the Politburo, Mikhail Gorbachev. In the event a Brezhnev protégé was selected to replace Andropov, the aged and infirm Konstantin Chernenko, who lasted barely thirteen months until March 1985, allowing Gorbachev to come to power.

### Document 9.32 Andropov on Continuity and Nationality Issues

In the short time allowed him, Andropov launched a vigorous anti-corruption campaign in which many of Brezhnev's associates and relatives were implicated. On the political level he brought in new people and conceded some space for divergent views on the way forward. The campaign against dissent, however, was not halted, and indeed the struggle against absenteeism and other forms of social laxness was intensified. In his first speech as leader to the Central Committee on 22 November 1982 (*Pravda*, 23 November 1982), Andropov promised continuity, but opened the door to a renewal of détente and closer relations with China. While Andropov

might have been well informed about corruption and political deviancy, he gave no indication that he understood the tension in nationality relations. The fifty-three national federal units in the USSR were ranked in a hierarchy and patterned as a matryeshka doll, with some areas contained within others. His speech on the sixtieth anniversary of the USSR on 21 December 1982 was a classic summary of the Soviet thinking of the period, but he was far too sanguine about the resolution of the national question.

### *The USSR: Sixty Years*

Marxism revealed for the first time ever an organic link between the nationalities problem and the social, class nature of society, the prevailing type of ownership. In other words, the roots of relations between nations are embedded in the social soil. From here Marx and Engels drew their fundamental conclusion: the abolition of social oppression is an indispensable prerequisite for the abolition of ethnic oppression. '... Victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie', Marx said, 'is simultaneously a signal for the emancipation of all oppressed nations.' The immortal slogan 'Workers of the world, unite', the working people's international struggle against all forms of enslavement, both social and ethnic . . .

What looks obvious today was by no means so obvious in that stormy transitional period. The quests for concrete forms of statehood, for political institutions to embody the general ideas and prerequisites of a nationalities programme, aroused heated debates. Conflicting opinions ranged from a programme of loose, amorphous unification of the Republics in a confederation to a demand for their simple incorporation into the Russian Federation on the principle of autonomy. It took Lenin's genius and prestige to find and affirm the only correct path, that of socialist federalism . . .

All nations and national minorities living in the twenty autonomous Republics and eighteen autonomous regions and districts as one friendly family successfully bring their potentialities into play. Millions of Germans, Poles, Koreans, Kurds and members of other nationalities are fully-fledged Soviet citizens for whom the Soviet Union has long been their homeland.

The peoples of this country feel especially warm gratitude to the Russian people. Without its selfless fraternal assistance the present achievements of any of the Republics would have been impossible. A factor of exceptional significance in the economic, political and cultural life of this country, in promoting the unity of all its nations and national minorities, in giving them access to the wealth of world civilization, is the Russian language, which has naturally become part and parcel of the life of millions of people of any nationality . . .

The real qualitative changes which have taken place in relations between nations over the last sixty years is evidence that the nationalities problem in the form we inherited it from the exploiter system has been successfully resolved finally and irreversibly. For the first time in history the multinational



composition of a country's population has turned from a source of its weakness into a source of its strength and prosperity.

Source: Yu. V. Andropov, *Speeches and Writings*, 2nd edn (Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1983), pp. 1-2, 5.

### Document 9.33 Andropov and the Need for Flexibility

In other respects, Andropov was rather more open to change and acknowledged some of the problems facing the country, although he vigorously defended Soviet achievements.

*The Teaching of Karl Marx and Some Problems of Socialist Construction in the USSR*

On the basis of a socialist ownership of the means of production we have built a powerful economy, which is being developed according to plan, enabling national economic and social problems of great scope and complexity to be attacked and solved effectively. Needless to say, these possibilities of ours do not mean that we can rest on our oars. Problems and grave difficulties can and do arise in this field. They vary in origin but are never associated with the essence of public, collective ownership which has been firmly established and has proved its advantages. On the contrary, some of the bottlenecks interfering at times with normal work in certain fields of our national economy are caused precisely by departures from the norms and requirements of economic life, which is based on the strong foundation of socialist ownership of the means of production . . .

We are now focusing our minds on enhancing the efficiency of production and the economy as a whole. The party and the Soviet people are profoundly aware of the importance of this problem. As far as its practical solution is concerned, however, the progress to be seen here is not as successful as it should be. What hinders this progress? Why do we fail to get sufficient returns on the enormous investments we make, and why are the achievements of science and technology applied in production at a rate that cannot satisfy us?

One could list many causes, of course. First of all, one cannot fail to see that our work in perfecting and restructuring the economic mechanism, and the forms and methods of management, is lagging behind the requirements made by the level attained by Soviet society in its material, technological, social and cultural development. This is the main thing. At the same time one can also feel the impact of such factors, for instance, as large shortfalls in supplies of farm produce over the last four years, and the need to invest growing amounts of financial and material resources in developing fuel, energy and raw materials resources in the country's northern and eastern areas.

One may again and again reiterate Marx's fundamental idea that acceleration of the progress of productive forces requires corresponding forms of organization of economic work; but matters will be at a standstill until this theoretical principle is translated into the concrete language of practice. Today, first priority is attached to the task of planning and consistently implementing measures capable of lending greater scope to the action of the colossal constructive potentials inherent in our economy . . .

One should in general handle with care the so-called fundamental truisms of Marxism, because one guilty of misunderstanding or ignoring them is severely punished by life itself. For instance, the full significance of Marx's views on distribution was only realized at the cost of great pains and even mistakes. He persistently pointed out that in the first phase of communism every worker 'receives from society after all deductions exactly as much as he himself gives society', that is, in strict accordance with the quantity and quality of his work which conforms to the basic principles of socialism: 'from each according to his abilities, to each according to his work'. A consistent democrat and humanist, Marx was a strong opponent of wage levelling and categorically rejected demagogic or naive arguments, which were fairly common in his time, depicting socialism as a society of 'universal equality' in distribution and consumption . . .

However, suffice it to take a look at the manpower shortage and the demographic situation in the country to realize clearly the economic disadvantage of further retention of a large share of manual, non-mechanized work which accounts for 40 per cent in industry alone. This is why it is so vital today to accelerate in every way the rates of scientific and technological progress, to apply its achievements more actively, primarily in those areas where labour inputs are especially great . . .

In our country exactly as, incidentally, in any country where the working class, the working people, took over political power, this meant a triumph of democracy in the most literal and precise sense of the word - a genuine triumph of government by the people. The working people finally achieved the rights and freedoms capitalism had always denied them and does deny them today, if not formally, then in fact . . .

In the course of building a new society the content of socialist democracy is enriched, restrictions imposed by historic necessity are lifted, and the forms of the exercise of people's power become more diversified. This progress is closely bound up with the development of socialist statehood which itself undergoes qualitative changes. The most important of them is the development of the state of the dictatorship of the proletariat into a state of the whole people. This is a change of enormous significance for the socialist political system. It is recorded in the Constitution of the USSR of 1977 which has provided the legislative foundation for the further intensifying of socialist democracy . . .

Soviet society has abolished the gulf between the interests of the state and



the citizen existing under capitalism. Unfortunately, there are still a few individuals who attempt to impose their selfish interests on society and its other members. In this light one can clearly see the need for work in education, and sometimes in the re-education of certain individuals, for struggle against violations of socialist law and order, of the rules of our collectivist community life. This is not a violation of 'human rights', as is hypocritically alleged by bourgeois propaganda, but real humanism and democracy which means government by the majority in the interests of all working people.

*Sources:* Kommunist, no. 3, 1983; Andropov, *The Teaching of Karl Marx and Some Problems of Socialist Construction*, Speeches and Writings, pp. 281, 282, 285, 288, 289–90, 292.

### Document 9.34 The Role of Ideology

The death of Brezhnev permitted a profound debate over the content and role of ideology in the Soviet Union. In his speech on the hundredth anniversary of the death of Marx in January 1983, Andropov revealed a slightly more pragmatic approach in arguing for a re-evaluation of the role of ideology.

To verify one's actions by the principles of Marx, of Marxism-Leninism, is by no means to compare mechanically the process of life with certain formulas. We would be worthless followers of our teachers if we satisfied ourselves with a repetition of truths they had discovered and relied on the magic power of quotations once learned by heart. Marxism is not a dogma but a living guide to action, to independent work on complicated problems we are faced with at every new turn of history . . . We Soviet communists are proud to belong to the most influential ideological movement in the entire history of world civilization – Marxism-Leninism. Fully open to what is best and most advanced in modern science and culture, it is today the focus of the world's intellectual life and reigns over the minds of millions upon millions of people. This is the ideological creed of an ascending class liberating all mankind. This is the philosophy of social optimism, the philosophy of the present and future.

*Sources:* Kommunist, no. 3, 1983; Andropov, *The Teaching of Karl Marx and Some Problems of Socialist Construction*, Speeches and Writings, pp. 296, 297–8.

While Andropov asserted that all the antagonistic contradictions had been resolved by the transition from capitalism to socialism, non-antagonistic ones remained that could not be ignored. Battle was joined at the June 1983 'ideological plenum' of the Central Committee. Andropov spoke in favour of the 'creative use of ideology'. Marxism, he argued, does not give answers in ideology once and for all. Chernenko

countered, however, by asserting that 'there are eternal verities, some truths which cannot be changed'. His was the voice of an old generation unremittently hostile to the modernisation of the ideology. Andropov, in contrast, insisted that changes in the productive forces required changes in production relations and he attacked 'formalism' and 'mechanical repetition' (Andropov, 1983, pp. 340–59).

### Document 9.35 Zaslavskaya – the Novosibirsk Report

Discussions between academics at the Academy of Sciences in Novosibirsk gave rise to a report presented in April 1983 by the economic sociologist Tatyana Zaslavskaya to a closed seminar of top economic officials. Its central argument, too radical to be published at the time, suggested that the Soviet economic system had barely changed in fifty years and had outlived its potential. Only a shift from the administrative system towards greater use of the market and decentralisation could overcome the accumulated problems. She stressed the social pathologies generated by the existing system as much as its economic deficiencies, and warned that entrenched social forces would resist reform.

Over a number of decades, Soviet society's economic development has been characterized by high rates and great stability . . . However, in the past 12–15 years a tendency towards a noticeable decline in the rate of growth of the national income began to make itself felt in the development of the economy of the USSR . . . [T]here is a more general reason at the foundation of this phenomenon. In our opinion it consists in the lagging of the system of production relations, and hence of the mechanism of state management of the economy which is its reflection, behind the level of development of the productive forces. To put it in more concrete terms, it is expressed in the inability of this system to make provision for the full and sufficiently effective use of the labour potential and intellectual resources of society.

The basic features of the present system of state management of the economy of the USSR (and thus of the system of production relations to which it gives rise) were formed roughly five decades ago. Since that time, this system has repeatedly been readjusted, renewed and improved, but not once has it undergone a qualitative restructuring which would reflect fundamental changes in the state of the productive forces . . . The structure of the national economy long ago crossed the threshold of complexity when it was still possible to regulate it effectively from one single centre . . .

Any serious reorganization of economic management must be accompanied by a certain redistribution of rights and responsibilities among various groups of workers . . . Thus, a good number of workers in the central organs of management, whose prospective role ought to be increased, is afraid that its responsibilities will become substantially more complicated, as economic [i.e. market] methods of management demand much more of highly qualified cadres than do administrative methods . . .

In the light of what has been said, we must admit that the social mechanism of economic development as it functions at present in the USSR does not ensure satisfactory results. The social type of worker formed by it fails to correspond not only to the strategic aims of a developed socialist society, but also to the technological requirements of contemporary production. The widespread characteristics of many workers, whose personal formation occurred during past five-year plans, are low labour- and production-discipline, an indifferent attitude to the work performed and its low quality, social passivity, a low value attached to labour as a means of self-realization, an intense consumer orientation, and a rather low level of moral discipline . . .

It is our conviction that both the expansion of these negative phenomena and the lowering of the rate of growth of production come about as a result of the degeneration of the social mechanism of economic development. At present, this mechanism is 'tuned' not to stimulate, but to thwart the population's useful economic activity. Similarly, it 'punishes' or simply cuts short initiatives by the chiefs of enterprises, in the sphere of production organization, aiming at the improvement of economic links. Nowadays, higher public value is placed not on the activities of the more talented, brave and energetic leaders, but on the performances of the more 'obedient' chiefs, even if they cannot boast production successes.

Source: Tatyana Zaslavskaya, 'The Novosibirsk Report', Survey, vol. 28, no. 1, Spring 1984, pp. 88, 91, 99, 106.

It was left to Gorbachev to resolve the issues raised by Zaslavskaya, beginning with the adoption of Andropov's modest opening and then dramatically extending the scope for debate and change.

## Crisis and fall of the Soviet system, 1985–1991

By the early 1980s crisis symptoms were everywhere apparent. The country faced new economic challenges provoked by advanced modernisation, and political challenges stimulated by the effective extended political exclusion of the mass of the people. Life within the party itself had become formalised and dull, while the soviets were bureaucratised and lifeless. Responses to the crisis were at first partial, stressing notions like 'acceleration' (*uskorenie*), 'openness' (*glasnost*) and 'restructuring' (*perestroika*), before more global approaches began to emerge examining the problems facing the Soviet Union in terms of 'systemic crisis' and problems of civilisational integration. Towering over this last period is the personality of the USSR's last leader, Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev, who was elected General Secretary of the party in March 1985.

### Early Experiments

Zaslavskaya had condemned the way that the economy systematically undermined initiative and promoted alienation, arguing that middle-level functionaries were the most resistant to reform out of fear for their privileges. It was now time for Gorbachev to discover the route and possibilities of reform.

### Document 10.1 Gorbachev's First Views

Although Gorbachev had already indicated dissatisfaction with the system, in particular in a speech of December 1984 when he had first raised the themes of *perestroika*, his early speeches as leader gave little indication of what would come later. The biggest change at first appeared to be one of style, with an active and obviously intelligent leader at the helm of the Soviet Union after so many years of rule by gerontocrats, rather than one of content. Elected General Secretary of the party at the Central Committee plenum of 11 March 1985, he had this to say.

The strategic line, developed at the Twenty-sixth Congress and later Central Committee plenums with the active involvement of Yu. V. Andropov and K. U. Chernenko, was and remains unchangeable. This line is for the acceleration of the socio-economic development of the country, for the improvement of all aspects of the life of society. We are speaking about the