

THE CHANCES OF GORBACHEV'S REFORMS

Zdenek Mlynar

Gorbachev's attempt to set the Soviet system into motion after long years of stagnation is only in its beginning and there is no way of making a reliable prediction about what changes it might lead to. Even though opinions on this subject differ, it is possible to agree that the intended changes which are now being officially announced in the USSR go further than was generally anticipated two years ago when Mikhail Gorbachev acceded to the highest Party office.

This is suggested, for example, by the considerable radicalization of the vocabulary of official Soviet policy. While at the outset there was talk mainly of the need to "improve the economic mechanism", the year 1986 introduced the notion of "radical reform", while nowadays there is frequent talk of the "revolutionary nature" of the reforms which need to be implemented in the Soviet system, and not only in the sphere of the economy. In line with this the demands and expectations of all who are observing or appraising Soviet developments are growing too: many things which many observers would have regarded as an exaggerated demand two years ago appear today as an inadequate compromise.

But the radicalization of Soviet terminology also contributes to the contradiction between proclaimed targets and reality becoming more visible and more pronounced. The authors of Soviet policy themselves are aware of this, which explains why they say more frequently (and correctly) that developments are only at the very outset, that a radical turn has in fact not yet set in and that the reform will be a long-term process.

This distinction between the changes already implemented and the proclaimed intentions is no doubt of extreme significance both for the reform policy itself and for its analysis from without. But it is equally important to distinguish between what is realistically possible in the short term, (for example during the next five years), and what is a mere long-term development hypothesis. After all, long-term prospects can be appraised as the more or less likely reality of tomorrow. Against this background I shall try to formulate some considerations which, in my opinion, are of decisive importance precisely for the short-term prospect, though not only for it.

I

The reform changes already implemented in the USSR indicate above all that—after roughly thirty years—the idea of the need for changes and reforms has become the official idea and the programmatic basis of the decisive political forces. In a system where the centre of power traditionally claims total control over all social life, the very recognition of the fact that past

practices have not been successful, that they have led to crises and that changes in the "mechanism of management" are necessary, is in itself a significant change in the overall political atmosphere. The aspiration of the power center to regiment all social activities is thus discredited to a certain degree, questions are admitted and existing criteria are changing. This in itself is a significant shift, a change in the previous state of affairs.

Another aspect of the present situation in the USSR is that Gorbachev's notion of reforms links in the most radical way so far the problems of economic reform with the socio-economic effects of economic changes. Though reforms in the sphere of economic relations or of the political system are still seen as an instrument towards achieving the desired economic targets, the assessment of the significance of socio-political shifts has nevertheless undergone considerable change in official Soviet thinking over the past two years. If these changes were seen at the outset as a complementary factor of the new "economic management mechanism", today (after the January 1987 plenum of the CPSU Central Committee) they are understood as the prerequisite for the success of the economic reform and as the condition for the achievement of ambitious economic objectives (the so-called "acceleration of development" which is hoped to be attained by mobilizing factors of intensive economic growth). But it is also a fact that neither the changes already carried out in the "mechanism of economic management" (i.e. the newly created relationships between enterprises and their superordinate institutions, the already implemented changes in methods of planning and the organization of management work in the economic sphere, certain new economic relations guaranteed by new laws, etc.) nor the existing vision of further changes in this mechanism provide any guarantee that the Soviet economy will really reach the targets for the year 2000 set by the political leadership. And what goes for the sphere of economic reform applies to an even greater measure to indispensable changes in the sphere of social and political relations.

This negative aspect is to some extent compensated by the fact that it is possible in principle to engage in critical discussions about all problems of the economic mechanism (as well as about many problems of the political system), that all major economic problems—starting with the position of the enterprise and including even the relationship between the plan and the market—have ceased to be taboo, that it is possible to put forward various alternatives of solving them and seek optimum answers to fundamental questions. One of the changes already carried out in the USSR is that it is permitted to ask questions which were previously forbidden and seek alternative replies to them even though the answers are often still missing.

This applies to a varying degree to all spheres of social life. In the sphere of economic management this openness is greater than in the sphere of the political system, but the process of seeking new answers to old as well as new questions, the search for new alternatives and solutions different from those tolerated in the past, this process is taking place everywhere, including the ideological sphere.

The process of innovating official ideology naturally demands adherence to

its most general framework (all that is involved is a new interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, not innovations proceeding openly and explicitly from different ideological sources); it is marked by contradictions and takes place unevenly in different spheres. The fact that certain ideas are no longer judged as being "revisionist", "right-wing" or "left-wing" deviations, as manifestations of "hostile" ideas, etc. is a significant new factor under Soviet conditions. On the contrary, the new political leadership is making a manifest attempt not to attach political labels to various ideological innovations, and to grant them considerable autonomy in relation to everyday policy.

Even though all this can merely be regarded as different facets or concrete manifestations of a changed political atmosphere—and one may say that the new political atmosphere is the only decisive new reality in the USSR which in my opinion creates a different, qualitatively new scope for the preparation and implementation of reforms (including possible structural changes of systemic significance for the future). Such scope did not exist before 1985.

This scope is today fully at the disposal of the reform—oriented section of the Soviet power elite. Excessively pessimistic considerations of recent years, denying the Soviet power elite as a social stratum the capacity for innovating the system, have not been borne out; this capacity is now demonstrated by the younger generation in this stratum. In other words: the current phase of reform developments in the USSR amounts essentially to a reform from above (a "revolution" from above, if we were to adopt the official terminology). I believe that this will be of decisive importance for short-term prospects, specifically in the following directions:

- a) The power elite will strive to retain control over the reform initiative, i.e. not to tolerate pressure for changes coming predominantly from outside its own ranks. The changes proposed will on principle be presented as a creative innovation by the political leadership, never as its retreat in the face of existing conditions or as crisis phenomena have surfaced against the will of the leadership.
- b) In the short term this will compel the power elite not to abandon the reform policy while consistently preventing the accumulation of contradictions in various spheres of social life which might produce undesirable pressure on the political leadership.
- c) Only those types of reforms or changes will be proposed and implemented whose content will not create the danger of various forces of resistance or apathy forming a strong alliance against reform that would endanger the position of the reformers. Should individual steps of the reform policy potentially give rise to such effects, they will be counterbalanced by other steps capable of ensuring the support of a clear majority for the entire reform policy.

All these are, of course, negative factors from the point of view of radical models which would favour system changes in the USSR resulting from mass "pressure from below," broadly along the 1980 Polish model. But they represent a great advance compared to conditions in the USSR two years ago when there was not only no comparable pressure from below (nor even any signs of it), but when the key positions of the power elite were controlled by

groups hindering all change; it is also a considerable advance from the point of view of a possible democratization of the Soviet system. The decisive factor for a possible democratization under the present situation is whether, given the hegemony of a policy of reform from above, there is sufficient scope for an alliance between this policy and real interest pressure from below.

I believe that in the USSR (as distinct from certain other countries of the Soviet bloc) such scope exists. As regards content, reform from above can link up with pressure from below on a whole range of questions related to the elimination of existing practices of bureaucratic, directive total control of social life (from the economy to culture) by the administrative apparatus.

In this respect the common ground on which an alliance between interests "from above" and "from below" is possible is a situation which offer various social subjects (from large social groups to labour collectives and even individuals) more opportunities and a greater ability to act autonomously within the framework of the given institutional forms and relationships of the Soviet political system.

In other words, in the short term, Gorbachev's reform is capable of creating certain qualitatively new relations between the regime and society within the existing institutions without having to eliminate certain decisive attributes of the political system (especially the monopoly position of the Communist Party). From the point of view of long-term hypotheses, this will naturally produce further future contradictions which will have to be solved. But the important thing is that such a solution will no longer be based on the present situation and present contradictions but on a qualitatively amended, reformed system with new contradictions.

II

If the bureaucratic directive methods of total control over social life (from the economy to culture) by the administrative apparatuses were to be abolished in the Soviet system, this would appear to be a mere change of the methods and manner of governing but would amount in reality to a much deeper transformation. Such a situation would allow even some of the contradictions that had been driven, by the method of total bureaucratic control, outside the confines of the existing institutional system into the sphere of semi-legality or even persecuted "dissidence" to act and be resolved within the framework of that existing system. The present differences between the real possibilities for entirely different contradictions with entirely different solutions, as exemplified by Hungary on the one hand and Romania on the other, to emerge within a basically identical institutional system, clearly demonstrate the significance of differing possible alternatives within an identical institutional system. Similarly, in Czechoslovakia, within a roughly identical institutional system, the contradictions and interests that were able to manifest themselves before 1968 (and throughout that year) were qualitatively different from those of 1970 and after. During the Khrushchev era, too, a number of critical (alternative) views or positions were able to emerge within

the institutions of the official system (for example, among the intelligentsia); it was only during the years of Brezhnev's restoration of total bureaucratic control that the advocates of such views or position were excluded from the official structures and driven into the position of "dissidents". Of course, the Soviet institutional system cannot integrate the advocates of all alternative (opposition) views or positions if the limits of a reform process controlled "from above" are not to be overstepped. (But all critical and opposition trends are subject to the proviso that the reform policy must find it in its own interest to cease exposing them to persecution.)

Only an institutional system capable of integrating the maximum number of alternative positions (contradictory interests) while condemning as few as possible to exist outside its framework stands a real chance of being democratized by way of reforms. This further increases the chances for integrated alternative interests and positions to apply politically relevant pressure on the entire system, to strive for gradual, reformist changes and not for an eruption of the system.

If Gorbachev's reforms in the USSR are to be successful in the short run, it is essential that the existence of different social interests (including those connected with a critical approach to the existing system) should be recognized and that it should be possible to express most of them within the existing institutional system. In the short term, the reform policy could be successful even if an independent (free) institutional expression of differing interests remained severely restricted (or even made impossible) and if its application were only permitted within the existing institutions. Such a state of affairs would only prove inadequate from the point of view of longterm prospects. Two different processes must take place simultaneously and concurrently within the framework of the limited development of the institutional system in the USSR:

- a) Changes of relations within the power elite as a social stratum. The present state where these relations are of a markedly undemocratic and autocratic nature, and where compliance with instructions from above is the key to success for a member of the power elite, must be changed qualitatively. It is essential for performance-based criteria to be applied within the power elite as the decisive criterion of success for the individual. On such a basis, it is then gradually possible to create even more democratic forms of responsibility within the hierarchy of the power elite itself (for example, a collective's responsibility within the power structures, eligibility within the same framework, and so forth). In principle, a power elite having become adjusted to shaping its internal life more democratically is better equipped to accept the democratization of the entire system.
- b) Hand in hand with these processes changes must take place in the feedback mechanisms between the regime and the society which it dominates (between the power elite and the social subjects dominated by it). This feedback must increasingly provide not only for the supply of objective information in both directions (especially "from below to the top"), but also for an increasingly effective control from below as well as

for an increasing significance and respect for the interests “from below” in the decision-making process.

To a certain extent, both these processes (which, in view of the situation existing in the USSR, are still remote and would represent a considerable degree of democratization) are feasible within the framework of the existing institutional structures of the Soviet system. I believe that this can be achieved by means of reforming the present Soviet political system in roughly four directions.

III

The first aspect of the reforms concerns the Communist Party. Both processes (democratization within the ruling elite as well the formation of new channels of feedback towards society) can take place simultaneously in the short term within the ruling Party which holds the monopoly of power. Reforms within the Communist Party can be of decisive significance especially for qualitative changes in the power elite itself. In addition to being an organization of the power elite as a social stratum, this party is also to some extent a social organism uniting people from other social strata. (One can estimate that roughly 30% of all Party members belong to the social stratum of the power elite. As a result of the present internal Party relations as well as of the relations and predominating methods of work within the Party, the latter as a social body (i.e. the majority of the membership from various social strata) has been subordinated to the Party as an apparatus of power (i.e. to the power elite and its interests). Internal Party reforms should generally serve to achieve changes in this direction, increasing the controlling role of the Party as a social organism vis-a-vis the Party as a power apparatus.

As pointed out, this could play an important part in the democratization process within the power elite, but it could also allow social interests that have hitherto been suppressed to assert themselves within the Party. Generally speaking, the Party in the present political system in the USSR is a kind of net through which social interests aiming to exercise legal influence in the political decision-making process must pass. With a membership of some 20 million the Party is capable today of allowing the formulation of entirely differing social interests within its ranks.

To do this substantial changes are needed in the methods of Party activity even in the short term. The claim to monolithic thinking and the denial of the right of minorities in the Party to defend their positions would have to be repudiated as principles governing internal Party relations. The present tendency generally applied in the reform policy of the CPSU could facilitate this: if applied consistently, the tendency of a “return to Leninism” in the sense of the Party’s practice of the 1920’s could create conditions within it providing for the confrontation of views, for discussions about various alternatives, for the possibility of minorities to manifest minority interests and views, etc.

In the light of long-term development and system changes connected with

it, different questions bearing on the position of the Communist Party will necessarily emerge, the following two in particular:

- a) The problem of the gradual merger of Party bodies (the apparatus) with State and economic management bodies, or rather the creation, within the Party of genuine centres of power and decision-making free from responsibility for the results of any decisions, from legal and other responsibility vis-à-vis society, as well as from the effects of the principle of division of labour and of authority. The existence of such centres of absolute power is incompatible, on a lasting and long-term basis, with a system of truly democratic decisionmaking and management.
- b) The Party must place itself in a position where it cannot evade control by society and undemocratically set up centres of absolute power within its area without hindrance. This can conceivably come about even by methods other than the mechanism of a Government and an opposition political party competing in elections. But these different methods must be elaborated in practice and incorporated in the workings of the Soviet system.

These problems, which will emerge in the long term, will of course be solvable only on condition that at least an attempt is made to consider them already in the short term and that they do not remain a taboo. This is difficult partly because if the reform policy is to stand any chance of success, the reform leadership must, in its own interest, retain the levers of centralized (absolute) power in its hands for the present as well as the near future. Without them it would not be able to dismantle the existing bureaucratic systems of power structures and apparatuses. The subordination of these apparatuses to the Party as a social organism under the slogan of “strengthening the leading role of the Party” is a necessary phase of development.

The second direction of reforms of the Soviet system is linked in the short term with changes which in their sum total will facilitate the achievement of a qualitatively different degree of self-expression for various social interests, both of large social groups and of smaller collectives (work collectives, local communities, etc.) as well as individuals. Even though this will take place in the foreseeable future within the framework of the existing institutional structure—with only some additional features—it could be a realistic step towards democratization.

The innovation that is already being introduced—the creation of councils of work collectives in Soviet enterprises and factories—could be of major importance for the further development of the Soviet system. It is a step along the road to institutionalizing self-management by producers (even though its economic or political possibilities are still far from clear). Such self-management might in the future become a fundamental network around which institutional structures expressing the different (even contradictory) sectional interests and positions of various social groups, collectives or individuals could be formed.

Only limited reforms can be expected in the short run within the framework of the existing structures of mass interest organizations (trade unions, the youth organization and others) which hold a monopoly and function on the

pattern of the Party's internal organization. This depends mainly on the achievement of greater autonomy for these organizations vis-à-vis the State and Party apparatus, a stronger emphasis on their task to represent specific interests, and the introduction of methods of activity corresponding to the reform policy (more consultation prior to decision-making, greater control by the members of officials and the apparatus, more criticism and openness in the organizations' work, etc.).

Different social interests can, of course, be expressed or applied more effectively than up till now even within elected state bodies or in the sphere of local administration (i.e. at various levels of the Soviets). This requires changes in the methods and style of work similar to those applicable to interest organizations—as well as certain innovations in the main aspects of the feedback between the Soviets and the population (the attitude towards the electorate, the election system, the possibility to choose from among several candidates, etc.).

In the long term, however, the Soviet system will have to come to grips with the problem of fundamental institutional innovation as regards the possibilities for various interests in society for organizing and asserting themselves in the political decisionmaking process. The existing institutional structures in the USSR essentially proceed from the premise that "all that is not permitted is forbidden." Only those social interests which are allowed to manifest themselves within the framework of the permitted structures of interest organizations may assume an institutional character. But if the entire system of management in the USSR is to change over genuinely from extensive growth to an orientation towards intensive growth factors (and this not only in the strictly economic sense of the word), it will be necessary in the long term to adopt the principle of "what is not forbidden is permitted." This means freedom of organization (and of assembly) as a principle, and restrictions laid down by law as an exception. As a result, all social interests (with the exception of those legally reprehensible) could then be institutionalized by forming associations, unions or interest organizations.

This would, naturally, require the restructuring of interest organization operating on a national level (most probably on the federal principle of voluntary "umbrella" associations of interest groups.) This problem emerged in the smaller Soviet bloc countries during the first attempts at reform, in Poland in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968, where a strong tradition was operating at the time of the Sovietization of the political system. It is, however, likely that in the USSR no significant pressure from below will operate in the short run.

The third major direction of reforms within the framework of the institutional system existing in the USSR is the filling of the present information gap. The decisive step in this direction is the widely applied principle of openness ("glasnost") in political life. Under Soviet conditions this essentially means the opposite of the secrecy that used to be one of the fundamental methods of governing in the past. The reform policy demands, on the one hand, criticism from below of that phenomena which it regards as negative. On the other hand, it requires the regime to publish information wherever its

concealment impedes the application of the principle of reward according to performance, prevents criticism and makes it difficult for society (the "recipients" of political instructions) to understand the regime's measures. In the present interpretation the principle of "glasnost" is essentially compatible with the autocratic decisionmaking process, though it requires that the society be consulted about which decisions are being taken beforehand and eventually be informed of the decisions taken and their main purpose. But it remains possible to make exceptions, in other words, to conceal autocratically all the regime feels necessary to conceal in a given situation. Even in this interpretation a reform policy could, under Soviet conditions, produce a situation from which a short-term return to the earlier information gap, facilitating total control from the centre and excluding autonomous action by the subjects under domination, would be impossible.

In the long term the problem will, naturally, emerge of how to ensure effective freedom of information in the Soviet system in the form of guarantees against its arbitrary restriction by the regime and in the sense of freedom of expression, of differing views, etc. The road towards the solution of this problem opened by the period of "glasnost" will, of course, be qualitatively different from the roads taken prior to Gorbachev's reform, and will be more promising.

The fourth main direction of reforms of the Soviet system is the further development of the attributes of a constitutional state. In the short run this means, above all, the continuation of endeavours to increase the role of legal norms in the process of running Soviet society, to ensure that the law is binding for everyone (i.e. to subordinate the power elite to the law), to abolish arbitrariness and unlawful privileges, etc. The principle of the separation of the powers will also have to be gradually established and the authority of individual sectors of the power mechanism will have to be determined; the executive must be subordinated to control by elected bodies and, most importantly, the judiciary must be independent and be subject solely to the law.

In the long term, the task of elaborating in practice a whole series of questions connected with the notion of democracy as a system of procedural rules for the solution of social conflicts will have to be outlined to Soviet society in the first place. This procedural aspect of democracy is traditionally underestimated and neglected in the Soviet system (in the guise of criticism of "merely formal equality"), democracy being identified exclusively with social welfare aspects ("the interests of the majority of the people"). This is linked to the official Soviet interpretation of civic rights as the duty of the State to provide for a number of specific needs of the population and not the right of the individual to autonomous action and protection from the regime.

IV

The possibilities for reforms of the Soviet system as regards their quality, scope and pace are limited by a whole series of contradictory factors. The

simplistic idea that there exists in the USSR bipolar tension between society, which longs for democracy, and the ruling "nomenklatura", which prevents it, does not correspond to reality. Neither does the notion that certain sections of the power elite are in favour of reform (for example, the economic apparatus) while others are against it (the army, the KGB).

The line between the pro-reform and the anti-reform forces runs both within all sections of the power elite (the Party, State and economic apparatus, the army and security services), and within the other social strata. In a certain sense it is even doubtful whether one can talk of a division of forces for or against reform. What is involved is perhaps a certain concept of reform—since probably only tiny minorities nowadays deny the need to change the existing state of affairs. But what is to be changed and how this is to be done—that is the essential subject of contention.

Gorbachev's concept of reform (a more efficient economy, to be achieved especially by the application of the principle of performance plus the rationalization and democratization of all levels of social life) basically pursues the aim of modernizing Soviet society along the lines of development of industrial society in the West; in my opinion it is, the fruit of an alliance of quite specific social forces.

These reform concepts are actively supported by the younger generations of Soviet society which were formed early in the post-Stalin period. They come mainly from among the Soviet "middle class" (the urban population with higher qualifications, i.e. with an education and higher, more differentiated consumer demands) and include large sections of the power elite as well as a growing number of people from some other social groups. These social forces are interested in the application of the principles of a "performance society" (this would bring them advantages since they are capable of a greater and more highly qualified performance than the social average). When present Soviet reform policy speaks of the growing "human factor" it means predominantly the younger, more highly qualified urban "middle class".

Yet all of Soviet society (including its "middle class") harbours considerable reservations about the present-day reform policy and retains a wait-and-see attitude. This is the result of long years of experience when all attempts at reform were sooner or later suppressed: it is typical that society remembers its stagnation as typical while recalling attempts at reform as short-lived exceptions.

It must be anticipated that large social groups in Soviet society whose basic social position is linked with an average or below average qualification and a corresponding position in the production process as well as in consumption for a long time will remain passive vis-à-vis the reform policy. These strata regard the guarantee of unchangeable social certainties (albeit on a generally low level) as being more important than the possibility of sharing in the competition struggle "according to performance." The reform will hardly bring these sections feasible improvements in their material position in the near future; it may even endanger it in some ways.

While the reform policy cannot count on the an active commitment (especially a willingness to take risks) by these strata, it need not fear their

active opposition. These social strata have no effective instruments or means to express such opposition in the present Soviet system and, moreover, not even they are adverse to a more rational management of society or to a lessening of the arbitrary impositions weighing on people.

Resistance to Gorbachev's reform concepts will continue to grow among different social strata. These are, above all, the groups which have been directly privileged by the present management system, i.e. mainly sections of the power elite tied up with those bureaucratic apparatuses whose significance is decreasing or which are even disappearing, but also groups of people outside the power elite linked with various forms of the "black market" of commodities, labour, and corruption.

We must also include social groups tied to traditional anti-democratic tendencies in Soviet society, inherited from the Russian past (tsarism) as well as from the days of the Stalinist system (in all its forms, i.e. including the neo-Stalinist Brezhnev phase). Such anti-democratic tendencies chiefly involve conservative authoritarianism (invoking essentially pre-capitalist, traditionally Russian Orthodox forms of organization of social life), "great Russian" nationalism, and the tendency towards hegemonism and racism (including anti-Semitism) cherished by both these tendencies.

In practice, one must anticipate that similar entrenched anti-democratic tendencies will assert themselves from time to time within reform developments as "pressure from below" even in relation to official political structures. In the Soviet Union it is conceivable that in certain situations such "pressure from below", calling for an autocratic system, might be temporarily stronger than pressure from below demanding democratization and features of a pluralist political system.

The typical aspects of reform developments in the USSR are and will consist in the fact that even though slogans advocate the solution of the problems of a modern industrialized society, in reality we are faced with an entanglement of problems (sometimes even a Gordian knot), some of which have their roots in Russia's pre-capitalist past, others in the Stalinist dictatorship, and only the rest in modern industrialization. Industrial society is represented in contemporary Soviet reality by some features (for example, a comparable degree of the development of productive forces, technology and social groups possessing the corresponding skills), while other features typical in the West are missing in the USSR (for example, people's habits linked to a market economy, competition, etc., the corresponding network of horizontal relations of interaction between various social groups or individuals; this is absent in Soviet society where people have no such experience). All this will naturally influence the nature and forms of such processes not only in the near future but also in the more remote outlook, as regards above all the growing possibilities and ability of social subjects to act autonomously.

The victory of Gorbachev's reform concept is by no means secure in the long run. I do not believe that Gorbachev is bound to share the fate of Khrushchev: his policy is not opposed by an alliance of all the forces of resistance or indifference, as was Khrushchev's policy at the time of his downfall in 1964. But even Gorbachev has to make an immense effort to

ensure that such a situation does not arise. The most vulnerable spot in Gorbachev's reform concept is its call for radical democratization. In the event of a conflict it can be expected that compromises and concession will have to be made in this sphere.

Even the limited reforms within the framework of the existing institutional political system in the USSR that have been mentioned in the earlier sections of this paper, and that appear rather as a minimum programme, will not necessarily be implemented without opposition. Not even the greater chances for "pressure from below" need inevitably lead to success in this respect.

V

Gorbachev's reform policy officially acknowledges for the first time that the existing Soviet system is the fruit of a specific historical development in the USSR (above all in the 1930's and 1940's) and that it was a mistake to identify the organizational forms created by this development with socialism as such. The old quarrel as to whether Soviet reality is or is not the embodiment of the so-called "general laws of socialism" is being settled in a round-about way in contradiction to present dogmatic positions.

In accordance with this the reform policy of the Soviet leadership regards itself as a primarily internal Soviet affair and has so far avoided practical steps which might give the impression of imposing the new policy on the other countries in the Soviet bloc. The Soviet reform policy prefers to act as an example. This is broadly justified because it is a stage in the development of the mother country's system which has been gradually introduced in the smaller Soviet bloc countries (to a varying degree by coercion). The reform of the system in the USSR cannot fail to have a decisive significance for these countries although, as in the past, the reform in these countries cannot limit itself to copying the USSR.

In a certain sense, it can be said that the development of the Soviet system is also of major significance for socialist endeavours throughout the world, since the world process, too, has been substantially marked by the reality of the Soviet system. The connection between the Soviet reform policy and the development of socialism in the world (and, specifically, other attempts at reforming the Soviet-type system) is therefore both of theoretical and of practical significance.

From this point of view, the reform policy endeavours to present itself as an entirely original process, not shaped by any earlier model. This is understandable in the light of the interests of practical policy: after all, it would not be advisable to compare it with the ideas or practical attempts which the CPSU leadership labelled in its time as "revisionist" or "counter-revolutionary" and which it suppressed by force whenever possible.

But if this tendency were to continue in the future it would have extremely harmful consequences. On the one hand, the Soviet reform ideology and policy would make itself look ridiculous and devoid of credibility if it persisted in arguing that the contents of the present Soviet "new thinking" were something nobody had thought of until the CPSU Central Committee

adopted its recent resolutions. But on the other hand, and far more significantly, the Soviet reform concepts would miss the chance to draw on experience from elsewhere and to appraise certain factors of their own future development against the background of the practical experience, or at least theoretical considerations and analyses, of other countries (regardless of whether they're "socialist" or "capitalist").

In my opinion, many elements of the present Soviet reform policy are closest to the experiments of the Yugoslav communists in the 1950's (despite many basic differences). What is identical, above all, is the endeavour to combine the political monopoly of the Communist Party with the concept of self-management, which is based on the labour collective as the fundamental social subject under socialism. As we know, this concept ensured a dynamic, promising development of the system in Yugoslavia for some fifteen years; only later did its potential internal contradictions come to a head, and since they were not solved in an adequate manner, the system gradually reached a state of crisis. And the less the Soviet reform policy today analyzes the Yugoslav experience, the less does it recognize these analogies and their positive and negative aspects.

Similarly, the present practice, whereby the new reform policy and ideology no longer refer to negative assessments of various attempts to introduce systemic changes in the smaller Soviet bloc countries (in 1956 or 1968) without proceeding to their objective analysis and comparison with present Soviet reality, can only lead to an impasse. The stubborn insistence of Soviet reform ideologists that only the "aberrations" and "mistakes" contained in such past developments are a relevant topic for the USSR today and that there is no need for a fundamental reappraisal of the past, politically expedient, assessment of this experience—all this can only harm the interests of reform in the USSR. It not only limits the Soviet Union's own self-knowledge but also prevents it from understanding that in the future, too, developments will take place in certain European Soviet bloc countries that will be more radically democratic than those in the USSR.

The Gorbachev leadership still sees the international aspect of the reform policy exclusively as a move towards a qualitative change in the sphere of conflict relations between the superpowers (especially the path to the "demilitarization" of that conflict). In this field, the new Soviet leadership has come forward with exceptionally significant and unexpected innovations. The primary importance of these questions from the political point of view is obvious and this paper has no intention of denying or belittling them.

But it remains a fact that the Soviet reform policy has so far utterly failed to work on the international dimension beyond the sphere of interstate, power relations between the so-called East and West. On the contrary, the predominant preoccupation is to isolate this policy from "foreign influences", to demonstrate that in reference to democracy or the content of socialist endeavours, no inspiration can come "from the West", and none is, indeed desirable. "The West" continues to be seen wholly in the spirit of the old ideology as an "alien system," incapable of offering positive lessons except about production and technology.

This is tantamount to the conservation (deliberate perhaps only in part) of one of the essential features of the Stalinist system, of its tendency to isolate itself from those forces of international development (including the international workers' movement, international socialism, foreign left-wing forces, etc.) which are not directly controlled by the power centre in the USSR. Such an approach implies that socialism still exists in "one country alone" (in the sense of a bloc of states).

It is probable that a fundamental change in this attitude will only come in the wake of political successes in the "demilitarization" of so-called East-West relations and the emergence of cooperation between East and West and the experiences which this would bring. As long as the overwhelming vision of the "West" as a whole is that of the potential enemy and military adversary, we can hardly expect the Soviet system to display openness or readiness to self-criticism towards the "West."

On the other hand, given that the present attempt at reform in the USSR is also an attempt to seek answers to the problems of a modern industrialized society, such isolation, in the long run, can only be harmful. Soviet society, which has not yet even gone through the present stage of modern industrialized society characteristic of the West and lingers in a phase of optimistic expectation about the "scientific and technical revolution", urgently needs a corrective, perhaps in the form of a stand by the broad Left in the West against the negative consequences of the industrial application of the "scientific and technical revolution." But this is impossible as long as Soviet ideology concentrates on relations between states (and power elites) and neglects the need for an exchange of experience between the societies themselves on an international scale.

To the extent that the destinies of socialism (and not only of the power structures of Soviet society) are at stake in the present phase of Soviet development, the CPSU as well as other sections of Soviet society will in time have to become capable of establishing relations of cooperation, partnership and critical solidarity with the Left in the West and with all critical trends in Western societies. Until this happens, the isolation of the Soviet system will continue to lead to the reproduction of a host of anti-socialist (and anti-democratic) tendencies.