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GORBACHEV'S REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES

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The new Soviet leader, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, in speaking to the students of the Kalinin Polytechnical Institute in Leningrad on May 16, 1985, defined his program as, "Not evolution, but revolution."<sup>1</sup> "Life and dynamism," he declared at the Central Committee Plenum on April 23, 1985, "dictate the necessity of further changes and transformations, the achievement of a new qualitative condition of society, and moreover, in the broadest sense of the word. This is, above all, the scientific and technical renewal of production and the achievement of the highest world level of productivity. It is the improvement of social relations, primarily economic relations. It is the activation of the whole system of political and social institutions and the deepening of socialist democracy and the self-government of the people."<sup>2</sup> He went on to say, "What we need are *revolutionary changes*" (*nuzhny revolyutsionnye sdvigi.*)<sup>3</sup>

What Gorbachev wants, in Marxist terms, is a simultaneous transformation of the productive forces and relations together with a change in "all forms of social life" in the ideological "superstructure" of Soviet society, or as he explained in his program speech on December 10, 1984, "profound transformations in the economy and the whole system of social relations."<sup>4</sup> In his address to the French National Assembly on October 3, 1985, Gorbachev claimed, "We have set off on the road to achieving a new qualitative state of Soviet society."<sup>5</sup> In international relations, he called for a "departure from traditions, from a mentality and manner of action that took centuries to form." The Kremlin leader presented himself as an example for such a new approach. "We have started the rethinking, the adjustment to full conformity with the new realities of many customary things, including the military and, naturally, the political fields."<sup>6</sup> The point was stressed again by Gorbachev

in his summit talks with President Reagan in Geneva, to whom he explained "our assessment of the international situation and our basic premise" (according to a news conference on November 21, 1985). "Over recent decades in the world there have been radical changes, radical changes that require new approaches and fresh thinking about a number of issues that affect foreign policy."<sup>7</sup> The old approach to stopping the arms race "will take us no further." He called for a "new policy which answers the needs of today's states and the realities of today, and all the things which world history has put to the forefront." For this he proposed a united effort "to change the direction of the situation that we find ourselves in."

### "Continuity" or "Change"

Gorbachev presents himself as a man of change and the bearer of new tidings who wants to modernize the Soviet economy and society and play a major role in world affairs. With him, a younger generation has come to power in the Kremlin. They were born after the October Revolution, did not fight in World War II, and started their careers after Stalin, in the spring of Khrushchev's era. Gorbachev is not only a product and a representative of this change of generations, swept to the top by this inevitable process. By his personality and career, and with his ambitious program for "revolutionary changes," he promised to be a strong leader who would overcome economic decline, solve the growing social crisis, reestablish the Soviet Union's role as a superpower, and end the four-year period of troubles during which three ailing and dying leaders succeeded one another. His combative qualities and sense for power were proven in the leadership struggles that took place during

Brezhnev's last days and during the transition from Andropov to Chernenko, in which he finally decided the succession to the leadership for himself, against strong opposition. As a younger man who promised to make a break with a disappointing past and usher in the beginning of better times, Gorbachev appeared a savior to the party-elite, the population at large, and the East European allies as well, who were frustrated by the hopelessness and uncertainty of the prolonged rule of the "gerontocrats" and were clamoring for a change in leadership and policy. The internal crisis, which developed at the beginning of the 1980s and deepened particularly with the economic setbacks in early 1985, was conducive to a radical remedy by the selection of a young, strong leader. It was not easy for the reigning "gerontocrats" to cede their power to a younger generation and resign themselves to the second echelon; doubts about the abilities and ambitions of their successors still seem to linger, and their resistance to Gorbachev's changes remains. Stagnation, lack of decisions, irregularities, and a series of curious events within the Kremlin since the end of 1981 were probably not caused by age and health reasons alone. From behind the facade of a "collective leadership" and a smooth transition from one old and dying leader to another, there emerged the reality of a fierce controversy about the "perfection of developed socialism" and "deformations of socialism," and about "continuity" and "change," that continues and is renewed in the present discussion about the new party program.<sup>8</sup> At the core of the emerging theoretical controversy between party ideologues is the question of the merits and faults of the Brezhnev era--domestic and foreign policy, from Brezhnev's "stability for cadres" to his agricultural policy and the 1982 Food Program, the massive military build-up, the successes and failures of détente, and the diplomatic

price of Soviet expansion. This reevaluation was necessitated by two developments. On the domestic front, the economy had recessed, a crisis arose in Poland and the military invaded Afghanistan, and internationally, there existed the U.S. policy under Ronald Reagan and Deng Xiaoping's reforms in China. To summarize the contradictory arguments of these opinion-groups debating the Brezhnev era after his death, Chernenko, Tikhonov and Grishin saw Brezhnev's policy as successful in proving the advantages of "developed socialism" and that the present situation was not as bad as it appeared; therefore, continuity with his line, with only minor corrections, was recommended. In contrast, Andropov, Gorbachev and Ryzhkov believed Brezhnev's policy was responsible for the economic decline because, as Gorbachev said, "urgent contradictions were not successfully revealed and overcome in a timely way."<sup>9</sup> The overall situation was worsening; therefore, a change of policy was necessary and urgent.

Thus on one side a "change" is called for to prevent a crisis of the system, while on the other, the proponents of "continuity" argue that changes may worsen the situation and produce exactly the crisis they are trying to prevent--the old controversy between "modernists" and "conservatives." This is not only a fundamental controversy about the correct policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU); it is implicitly one about the party leadership and its personnel as well. If "continuity" is the order of the day, it follows that the Brezhnevite "gerontocrats" who are hoisting the banner of continuity to preserve their reputation can and must remain in power. On the other hand, if change is called for, it would be logical that it be introduced by new leaders not tainted by the mistakes of the past and who promise a radical turnabout and change as a means to gain power.



Gorbachev's accession to power was part of this controversy. In 1983, sick Andropov chose him as heir of his policy of discipline and economic experiments; during 1984, Gorbachev tried to continue Andropov's policy of change against Chernenko's attempts to revive Brezhnev's "developed socialism." This power struggle between "Brezhnevites" and "Antibrezhnevites"--conservatives and modernists--did not end with Gorbachev's appointment as successor to Chernenko on March 11, 1985.

### **The Making of a Strong Leader**

Gorbachev's rise to power was neither accidental nor a preordained, logical, smooth process. Appearing to the outside world as a surprising newcomer, like a Siegfried out of the Black Forest, he in fact had an extraordinary career as a party functionary, well-established in its inner circles. He was born in 1931, in the Stavropol Region in the North Caucasus, the son of Russian peasants. He studied from 1950 to 1955 at the prestigious law faculty of Moscow University, and returned to his home province as Komsomol leader of the city and region of Stavropol. A CPSU member from 1952, he became a party-organizer in 1962, party chief of the city of Stavropol in 1966, and first secretary of the region in 1970 at the age of 39. One year later he was elected to the Central Committee as one of its youngest members, with no prior candidate-member status. Early on, he was apparently singled out and promoted by his protectors in the top oligarchy, Suslov and Kulakov (his predecessor party chiefs in Stavropol), who had become influential members of the Politburo in the post-Khrushchev era. As early as 1966, Gorbachev, an obscure and low secretary in Stavropol, was able to visit the

German Democratic Republic (GDR) and France with party delegations because Suslov was in charge of the CPSU's international relations. Elected in 1970 as a deputy to the Supreme Soviet, he became the chairman of its permanent commission on youth in 1974, and in 1979 took charge of its influential legislative commission. As party chief in the important agricultural region of Stavropol, and with the support of Kulakov, who was then the Central Committee secretary for agriculture, Gorbachev introduced experiments in farm organization and propagandized them in *Pravda* and *Kommunist*. When Kulakov died in July 1978, Gorbachev, still only a Central Committee member, delivered the funeral speech for the dead Politburo member. The absence of Brezhnev and his ilk from this funeral of their Politburo colleague, together with controversies about agro-politics, were evidence of a power struggle that ended with Kulakov's sudden death. On November 27, 1978, Gorbachev was promoted from Stavropol to Moscow and became Kulakov's successor as Central Committee secretary for agriculture. Shortly afterwards, in 1979, he became a candidate-member of the Politburo, and one year later the youngest member with full voting rights.

The rapid promotion of young Gorbachev was, to a certain degree, a provision to counterbalance the Brezhnevites who had been strengthened in the top leadership by the election into the Politburo of Chernenko in 1978 and Tikhonov in 1979, and by the retirement of Kosygin. Gorbachev was an independent addition to the "collective leadership," backed by Suslov against Brezhnev's attempts after 1977, when he combined the leadership of the party and the state in his hands, to aggrandize his position. As Secretary General, Brezhnev was in charge of agro-policy, with Gorbachev subordinate to him. Nevertheless each had different ideas and proposals for the improvement and

reforms of the lagging agricultural sector. Brezhnev, in a reversal of Khrushchev's "harebrained schemes," had given priority to tremendous capital investments in agriculture and to the build-up of large-scale "agro-industrial complexes," though had not been able to prevent a decline of harvests since 1979.

Gorbachev, on the contrary, had already favored forms of diversification of production in Stavropol, greater autonomy for teams and links by "applying progressive labor and organization methods, improving cost-accounting," introducing new technologies and know-how, strengthening labor discipline, and "developing rural life."<sup>10</sup> He promoted the so-called "Ipatovskiy experiment," a system for day-to-day management of all harvest operations on the scale of a *raion*, which was supported by a Central Committee degree in July of 1977.<sup>11</sup> As the man in charge of Soviet agriculture, Gorbachev expressed harsh criticism of its shortcomings and supported the extension of private plots and subsidiary enterprises.<sup>12</sup> Gorbachev's views were supported by Suslov, who earlier had not been very concerned with agriculture but who declared in Bryansk on September 17, 1979, "the population's private plots and enterprises' subsidiary plots are an important aid in providing Soviet people with quality food products" and complained that "the experience of progressive *raions*, teams and links" was not being utilized.<sup>13</sup> When Brezhnev presented his Food Program at the Central Committee Plenum in May of 1982 it was applauded by Chernenko, but Gorbachev, the Politburo member in charge of agriculture, remained silent and only later gave tepid support for it.<sup>14</sup>

As the newest and youngest member of the Kremlin leadership, Gorbachev distinguished himself from the older generation by ambitious appeals for "new ideas, new tasks" and a "fundamental new approach." He called for "radical

qualitative changes" in agricultural productive forces, "further improvements of the economic management mechanism, and a fundamentally new approach to the organization of agricultural production."<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the "modernist" Gorbachev presented himself as an energetic advocate of "law and order" and stressed "the need to insure strict state and labor discipline."<sup>16</sup> Thus Gorbachev's drive for change had already begun in the late days of the Brezhnev era.

### **Rivalry with Chernenko**

Gorbachev's ideas and career got an uplift under Andropov's leadership. It was not astonishing that Gorbachev sided with Andropov in promoting law and order and economic experiments. The old secret policeman preferred the young jurist to the Brezhnevite Chernenko, who nominally became the second secretary. Andropov put Gorbachev in charge of economic policy and cadres, reorganization of ministries and economic management, and the purging of Brezhnev's old and corrupt supporters in the *apparat*. He made Gorbachev his right-hand man and trained him as his successor. Gorbachev's elevated rank and power became evident when he delivered the speech at Lenin's birthday celebration on April 22, 1983. In May, he visited Canada and led the CPSU-delegation to the Portugese Communist Party Congress in December. Gorbachev, together with Ligachev, Romanov (all promoted to Central Committee secretaries), and probably the new KGB chief Chebrikov, formed Andropov's "young guard." Yet it was not they, but Chernenko, Tikhonov, and the "old guard" who decided the succession after Andropov's death on February 9, 1984. It was Brezhnev's successor-candidate, Chernenko, rather than Andropov's

chosen heir, Gorbachev, who became the new Secretary General. Gorbachev, the defeated pretender, spoke at the Extraordinary Central Committee Plenum on February 13, 1984, and acknowledged the "unanimous election of comrade Konstantin Ustinovich Chernenko to the post of secretary general of the CPSU Central Committee." He praised the "atmosphere of unity and cohesion" at the plenum, which showed that the party "will continue to follow the Leninist course formulated by the 26th CPSU Congress and by the November (1982) and June and December (1983) Plenums of the CC."<sup>17</sup> That is, it will follow the plenums and course established under Andropov. On behalf of the Politburo, Gorbachev expressed the confidence that "the members of the CC and all of the participants of the plenum will, on returning to the localities and to the party organizations, act in the spirit of unity and cohesion and high exactingness and responsibility which characterize the current plenum of the party's Central Committee. With that, he declared the plenum closed. But Gorbachev's speech was neither registered in the official communiqué of the plenum nor published in *Pravda*, and appeared only in a limited edition of the plenum documents, as a postscript to Chernenko's speech.

The newly-chosen leader, in his address to the plenum, defined continuity as "advancement relying on everything that has been earlier accomplished," and said, "it is necessary to evaluate realistically what has been achieved, without exaggeration but also without belittling." Chernenko, on the other hand, underlined his conservative attitude. "This is how it was in the past. This will always be so!" ("*Tak bylo ran'she. Tak budet vseгда!*")<sup>18</sup> It was clear that Chernenko was for the continuity of Brezhnev's line as defined at the 26th Congress in 1981, and not for the continuation of the Leninist course formulated at the November, June, and December plenums as Gorbachev had

advocated in his censored speech. Gorbachev explained in his election speech at Ipatovo, in his home region of Stavropol, that they have to "consolidate and to develop the position trends, and bolster and augment everything new and progressive that has become part of our social life recently; precisely this is the CPSU Central Committee's line of unconditionally ensuring continuity."<sup>19</sup> Gorbachev called for an "atmosphere of action and not of empty talks." This sounded like an indirect criticism of Chernenko. In any case, the contradiction between Chernenko's emphasis on "everything that has been earlier accomplished" and Gorbachev's commitment to "everything new and progressive" became evident.

Chernenko's cautious approach and his intention "to maintain the pace that has been set" was not sufficient for Gorbachev, Vorotnikov, Ligachev and Ryzhkov. In their election speeches in February of 1984, they pressed for an "acceleration of the development of the economy." The apparent differences between Chernenko and his second secretary, Gorbachev, were sharpened at the All-Union Conference on Problems of the Agro-Industrial Complex on March 26, 1984. Chernenko was full of praise for Brezhnev's 1982 Food Program and defended the continuation of Brezhnev's course. A different assessment was presented by Gorbachev, for whom "the implementation of the Food Program reveals a number of substantial shortcomings in the work of collective and state farms, of *oblasts* and republics and of ministries and departments," and who reached the conclusion, "the general picture cannot yet satisfy us."<sup>20</sup> For Gorbachev, it was vital "that our work in managing the economy should be made more dynamic and purposeful, that everything new and progressive be consolidated, and that order, discipline and the level of organization be strengthened." He called for bold, innovative solutions aimed at accelerating

economic development and intensifying social production, and said, "We have no other way out, in fact." In Gorbachev's view, "the course of intensification is not simply a world trend but also a vital necessity." Objective factors necessitate that "the competition between the two world systems, the well-known demographic peculiarities of the present stage of development, as well as the increasingly complicated mining and geological conditions of the mining industry and the restricted possibilities of capital investment." This statement was omitted in *Pravda*.

The difference between Chernenko and Gorbachev on the development of agriculture was confirmed again at the Central Committee Plenum on October 23, 1984, at which the two 'peasants', Chernenko and Tikhonov, introduced a new program for land amelioration. Gorbachev, who in his speech in Smolensk on June 25, 1984 had criticized such costly ventures, remained silent at the plenum, thus demonstrating his opposition.

Another apparent area of differences between the two party leaders was the preparation of the 12th Five-Year Plan (1986-1990). When Chernenko went on vacation on July 15, 1984, Gorbachev (together with Romanov, Ligachev and Ryzhkov) used his absence to convene a special Central Committee conference on the next five-year plan, the preparation of which he had declared inadequate. He called for a more innovative concept for the future. After Chernenko returned from his vacation at the beginning of September, Gorbachev's position seemed to decline. On September 7--the same day Ogarkov's ouster from the General Staff was announced, Gromyko's visit to the White House became publicized, and Honecker's trip to Bonn was cancelled--Gorbachev was sent to Bulgaria with the task of persuading Zhivkov to abstain from his planned visit to West Germany. The photograph published on the occasion of Gromyko's award

of the Order of Lenin on October 18 showed Gorbachev inexplicably ranked behind Romanov, his rival whom he would finally oust in July 1985.

As already mentioned, Gorbachev remained silent at the Central Committee Plenum on October 25, 1984, where Chernenko presented his proposals for the 1985 plan and the improvement of the economy. All members and candidates of the Politburo and Central Committee secretaries spoke on the general secretary's economic proposals except those directly concerned with the economy, namely Gorbachev, Vorotnikov, and Kolgikh.<sup>21</sup> The "approaching plenum" announced by Chernenko at this Politburo meeting, which traditionally would have taken place before the winter session of the Supreme Soviet, never materialized. This "missing plenum,"<sup>22</sup> which signaled the decline of Chernenko's rule, was caused not only by his deteriorating health, but probably also by unresolved controversies about his policy. In his one year as party leader, Chernenko was able neither to introduce effective reforms nor to make any changes in the personnel of the top leadership, which was further reduced by the death of Ustinov in December 1984. Under Chernenko, the stagnation of the late Brezhnev era returned. During Chernenko's absence and sickness at the end of 1984 and the beginning of 1985, Gorbachev presided over the meetings of the Politburo and took charge of its daily work. He became the *de facto* general secretary, while Gromyko and Grishin jointly stepped into the role of head of state.

Gorbachev, in an important ideological speech on December 10, 1984, presented himself not only as the party's chief ideologist in Suslov's mold, but also as a candidate for the succession with a program for a radical change. Only about one third of this speech was published in *Pravda* on December 11, 1984, and the most important statements, particularly those on



the international situation, were left out. The full text appeared as a brochure entitled "The Living Creativity of the People" (*Zhivoye Tvorchestvo Naroda*). The main contents of this speech--a call for a change and the explanation of its means and aims--became the guideline for Gorbachev's policy after his succession to power on March 11, 1985.

## APPENDIX

### Definition of the "present epoch" in the Third CPSU Program (1961) and the draft of the new edition (1981)

#### *1961 Program*

"The present epoch, the fundamental content of which is the transition from capitalism to socialism, is an epoch of struggle between the two opposing social systems, an epoch of socialist and national-liberation revolutions, an epoch of the downfall of imperialism and the abolition of the colonial system, an epoch of the transition of more and more peoples to the path of socialism, of the triumph of socialism and communism on a worldwide scale. The central factor of the present epoch is the international working class and its chief creation, the world socialist system."<sup>23</sup>

#### *1981 Draft Party Program*

"This is the epoch of the transition from capitalism to socialism and communism, of the historic competition of the two world socio-political systems, the epoch of socialist and national-liberation revolutions, of the downfall of colonialism, the epoch of the struggle of the chief motive forces of social development-world socialism, the workers and communist movement, the peoples of the liberated states and the mass democratic movements-against imperialism and its policy of aggression and oppression and for democracy and social progress...For all its unevenness, complexity and contradictions, mankind's movement towards socialism and communism is inexorable."<sup>24</sup>

## NOTES

1. BBC *Summary of World Broadcasts* (SWB), pt. 1, The USSR, SU/7955/B/5.
2. *Kommunist*, 1985, no. 7, p. 6.
3. *I.c.*, p. 8.
4. *Pravda*, December 11, 1984.
5. *Pravda*, October 4, 1985, SWB, SU/8075/A 1/1.
6. *Pravda*, October 4, 1985, SWB, SU/8075/A 1/5.
7. *Washington Post*, November 22, 1985.
8. Ernst Kux, "Contradictions in Soviet Socialism", *Problems of Communism* November-December 1983, vol. 33, no. 6, pp. 1-27.
9. M. S. Gorbachev, "Lively Creative Work of the People," speech at the conference on ideological work, December 10, 1984-FBIS-SU, February 19, Annex, p. 7.
10. *Kommunist*, 1976, no. 2, pp. 29-38.
11. *Ekonomicheskaya Gazeta*, February 1978, no. 9, pp. 1-5.
12. Gorbachev, speech at the Kolkhoz Conference, December 20, 1978-FBIS-SU, December 21, 1978, T 2.
13. *Izvestiya*, September 19, 1979-FBIS-SU, September 21, 1979, R 1ff. The close cooperation between Suslov and Gorbachev became even more evident when Gorbachev became the leader of the CPSU delegation to the Mongolian Party congress in May 1981 and to the Vietnamese CP congress in March 1982; apparently Gorbachev had taken over from Suslov the responsibility for Asian affairs in the Politburo.
14. *Kommunist*, July 1982, no. 10, pp. 6-21.
15. Gorbachev, speech at the 50th anniversary of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences, December 3, 1979, in *Sel'skaya Zhizn*, December 4, 1978, p. 2, FBIS-SU, December 31, 1978, T 1ff.
16. Gorbachev, report by the chairman of the legislative commission of the Supreme Soviet, *Pravda*, December 1, 1979.
17. *Materialy vneocheredo plenuma Tsentralnogo Komiteta KPSS*, February 13, 1984. Politizdat, Moskva 1984, p. 28f. Shortly afterwards in his election speech in Stavropol on February 29, 1984, Gorbachev did not speak anymore on "Lenin's course"--Brezhnev's favorite expression for his policy--but came out for "unswervingly implementing the guidelines of the 26th Congress,

which were creatively enriched and concretized by the Central Committee November, June and December Plenums." *Pravda*, March 1, 1984.

18. *Materialy*, 1.c., p.9f.
19. *Pravda*, March 1, 1984. Gorbachev repeated expressis verbis Andropov's call for action in his statement to the December 1983 Central Committee plenum: "The most important thing now is not to lose the tempo and the general positive mood for action and more actively to develop positive processes." *Pravda*, December 27, 1983.
20. Soviet television, March 26, 1984, in SWB SU/7630, March 28, 1984, C/1-6. In *Pravda*, March 27, 1984. Only a summary of Gorbachev's speech was published and important parts were censored. (By whom?)
21. In departure from normal practice, *Pravda*, November 16, 1984, published the minutes of this Politburo meeting, listed the participants and speakers, and printed the text of Chernenko's long speech.
22. Elisabeth Teague, "The Case of the Missing Plenum," *Radio Liberty Research*, RL 445/84.
23. *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. 13, no. 45, p.3.
24. FBIS-SU-85-208, p.8.