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Lord of the Manor: Boris Yeltsin in Sverdlovsk *Oblast'*

by Pilar Bonet

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LORD OF THE MANOR: BORIS YELTSIN IN SVERDLOVSK *OBLAST'*

INTRODUCTION

"Boris Yeltsin is neither the person he claims to be, nor the person whom you believe him to be." With these enigmatic words, Iakov Riabov tried to explain the nature of the man who had replaced him as head of the Sverdlovsk provincial Communist Party organization in 1976.[1] Riabov left the province for Moscow when he was appointed a secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), a position suitable for the top official of an *oblast'* as important as Sverdlovsk, the province that had for generations fueled the expansive spirit of the Empire by providing cannons to the tsars and tanks and missiles to communist leaders of the USSR.

Riabov recalled Yeltsin's reaction when, in 1968, Riabov announced that he had decided to give him a position on the Sverdlovsk *obkom*, despite the reluctance of certain officials who did not consider him worthy of such a promotion. Instead of thanking Riabov for the honor or promising to straighten himself out, Yeltsin immediately tried to find out the names of the people who had criticized him. Although Riabov did not say, Yeltsin eventually came to believe he had figured out who these people were and did his best to keep the suspects from being promoted. "He proved to be very vindictive, and this is a very serious fault," pointed out Riabov.

* * * * * *

Boris Yeltsin joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1961 and was elected First Secretary of the Sverdlovsk *obkom* in November 1976. He came from one of the oldest towns in the area, Butka, founded in the seventeenth century by Old Believers who had been persecuted for having refused to accept the reformation of the Russian Orthodox Church in accordance with the Greek rite. In his capacity as First Secretary in charge of the third-largest industrial complex of the Soviet state, Yeltsin was one of the most important regional leaders in the Soviet Union between 1976 and 1985.

Soviet power was smart enough to not entrust this province, where the majority of the population worked for the defense industry, to mere professional *apparatchiki* whose only experience had been gained from courses in political economy at the Higher Party School of the CPSU. The leaders of Sverdlovsk were people experienced in industry—experts on turbines, steel moldings, and the strength of various materials. Riabov's predecessor as head of the province had been Andrei Kirilenko, a military aeronautics engineer, and before him, Konstantin Nikolaev, who had organized the industrial evacuation of the Urals during World War II. Boris Yeltsin belonged to the same category as his predecessors.

As First Secretary of the Sverdlovsk *obkom*, Yeltsin found himself at the top of a pyramid-shaped organizational structure

1. Throughout this paper, the Soviet territorial administrative unit of Sverdlovsk will be referred to interchangeably as Sverdlovsk *oblast'* and Sverdlovsk province.

found throughout the entire country—a microcosm similar to the many other microcosms that comprised the USSR.[2] Although the Russian provinces were not scaled-down carbon copies of the country as a whole, the Soviet socialist regime did use similar models throughout its territory, which was divided administratively into diverse types of units, all run by organizations of the Communist Party. These organizations were divided into lower hierarchical organizations that were in turn subdivided further. The Soviet system homogenized administration: the outward appearance of cities, housing, people; it introduced social rituals; it unified ways of thinking and behaving. This process of standardization was so thorough that during the first few years of the post-communist era, one could take any Russian province to be a fairly accurate micro-model of society as a whole. Taken individually, each province or different geographic area possessed natural wealth to a greater or lesser degree, or had developed industry or local traditions to a greater or lesser extent. All, however, were mere variations on a common mold that had been designed to shape a new type of man at the service of a superpower.

Yeltsin was a vigorous person who carried out the orders of his Central Committee superiors with discipline and expected the same from his subordinates. Following instructions from Moscow, he ordered the demolition of the house of Engineer Ipat'ev—the site of the assassination of Tsar Nicholas II and his family. Upon his instruction, officials of the Party *obkom* organized themselves into volleyball teams (the First Secretary's favorite sport). When Yeltsin left his position at the top of the Sverdlovsk Communist Party hierarchy to go to work in Moscow in April 1985, his countrymen had both good and bad memories of him, but no one had the impression that he was a unique individual with whom their paths would again cross in a short time.

I. SVERDLOVSK *OBLAST'*

During the era of Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms, the city of Sverdlovsk (between 1924 and 1991 the capital bore the same name as the province) was, together with Moscow and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), one of the engines of change in Russia. In September 1991, by decision of the urban soviet, the city took back the name of Ekaterinburg, with which it had been christened upon its founding in 1723. The province continued to be called Sverdlovsk, in memory of a Bolshevik revolutionary by the same name.[3]

The province of Sverdlovsk is located in the north central region of the Ural mountains. Its total surface area is almost 194,800 square kilometers, more or less the size of Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, and Holland combined. More than half of this territory is covered with a thick forest which, in its northernmost areas, gives way to the swampy landscape characteristic of the tundra. Almost five million people live in the province; 87 percent of the

2. The provincial Party committee, or *obkom* (*oblastnoi komitet*), was the highest Communist Party body, or organ, in the territory of Sverdlovsk, followed by the city Party committees (*gorkomy*) and the district Party committees (*raikomy*).

3. For the purposes of this article, the provincial capital will be called by the name it used during the relevant period, that is, either Sverdlovsk or Ekaterinburg.

population is located in urban areas and the majority (94 percent in 1983) works in industry.

Inhabitants of the Urals boast that they have virtually the entire periodic table of Mendeleev under their feet. Indeed, they live in one of the regions richest in natural resources in all of Russia, surrounded by deposits of iron ore and nonferrous metals such as titanium, vanadium, chromium, nickel, manganese, bauxite, copper, and coal. In addition to gold, platinum, and diamonds, the province also possesses emeralds and decorative stones such as malachite—the symbol of the Urals. Most equipment used in the mining, petroleum, natural gas, chemical, and metallurgical industries of the USSR was produced in Sverdlovsk. The largest tank factory in the world is located in Nizhnii Tagil, the province's second largest city.

The Urals have been the backbone of Russian military power since the eighteenth century, when Tsar Peter I handed over the city of Neviansk and its surroundings to the blacksmith Nikita Demidov, who would forge the cannons that would enable Russia to take on the Swedes and open a way to the Baltic Sea. Demidov proceeded to build a personal metallurgic empire, complete with its own systems of justice and administration. Neviansk became the spinal cord around which the vertebrae of the first military–industrial complex of Russia would be built, a veritable cluster of foundries and towns of industrial serfs who either worked for Demidov or directly for the state at the forges of the Empire. The dusty factory towns that sprang up around iron ore deposits, such as Ekaterinburg (est. 1723) and Nizhnii Tagil (est. 1725), were transformed over time into industrial cities. Serfs turned into factory workers and, with the advent of Soviet power, assumed the official rank of the "hegemonic class." Nevertheless, for decades they remained just as much slaves of the enterprises that employed and housed them as their forefathers had been before them.

The industrialization of the 1930s, the brutal collectivization of agriculture, and the evacuation of factories from the western part of the country during World War II turned the province into an urban and proletarian environment. The quintessential aesthetic expression of this duality can be seen in the constructivist buildings which, despite their regrettable state of disrepair, bestow a special character on Ekaterinburg—for example, the House of the Czechists (1931), laid out in the shape of a hammer and sickle. Invigorated by the evacuation of factories from the western part of the country during the war, Sverdlovsk produced tanks, rockets, ammunition, missile parts, and nuclear fuel. According to the estimates of a provincial leader of Yeltsin's time, the gigantic military industry accounted for as much as 87 percent of all industrial output in the province, while production of consumer goods accounted for only 13 percent.[4]

One of the most serious problems in Sverdlovsk *oblast'* during Yeltsin's years in power there was a rural exodus that reduced the peasant population of the province to less than 650,000 people. This emigration, consisting mainly of

4. "This Land in the Hands of the Managers: A Monologue," Sergei Vozdvizhenskii, Chairman, Ural Regional Committee on Economic Development Programs, *Ural*, no. 12 (1993).

young people, continued into the early 1980s. Over the course of the three years 1980–83, a total of 190 small towns completely emptied out and 162 became "extinct." Eight thousand individual family plots met the same fate.[5] Living conditions were the determining factor of the exodus: there were no gas, sewage, or heating systems in most villages. In isolated areas, sanitation was practically non-existent; inhabitants of certain remote regions who had never travelled to the provincial center had only "heard" about modern utilities. The small towns in the interior were truly removed from civilization: out of a total of 2,400 villages, only 1,450 had bus service, with half of the buses forced to discontinue service in the spring and fall due to the lack of paved roads.[6]

The standard of living in the Sverdlovsk countryside was lower than the mean standard of the Russian Republic. Only 18 out of every 100 rural inhabitants had a radio, as compared to the Russian Republic average of 26.6 per 100. The 13 physicians for every 10,000 rural inhabitants of Sverdlovsk province stood in sharp contrast to the hundreds of medical doctors at Clinic No. 2 in the city of Sverdlovsk, who served approximately 10,000 privileged residents of the city. The media, upon whose propaganda the Communist Party so greatly relied, did not even reach a fair number of peasants in Sverdlovsk *oblast'*. Only 50 percent of the rural population received the first Soviet television channel and the reception rate in the province overall was far below the Russian Republic average of 71.4 percent. In one of the most backward districts of the province, only 3 percent of the homes had gas and water lines and there was no television reception at all.[7]

II. Lord of the Province

In the summer of 1976, problems in the Soviet Union in general and in Sverdlovsk in particular were officially non-existent. Peasants in the province had just initiated the tenth five-year plan of "efficiency and quality" on the right foot by harvesting 300,000 tons of grain, far surpassing projected production quotas. It had been a "wonderful victory for the peasants of the region" and to commemorate it, *Uralskii rabochii*, the instrument of the provincial committee of the Communist Party, inaugurated a new section entitled "Efficiency and Quality." The harvest, according to the paper, was a success of "the directives of Secretary General of the CPSU Leonid Il'ich Brezhnev."[8]

In early October, Brezhnev gave an interview to a western television channel. In every institution, factory, *kolkhoz*, and *sovkhoz* throughout the entire country, Soviet citizens were expressing their "support and deep gratitude" to their leader for his "untiring efforts to strengthen world peace and ensure the continued prosperity" of the USSR. Brezhnev's words inspired them

5. Center for the Documentation of Social Organizations of Sverdlovsk *Oblast'* (Russian acronym, TsDOOSO), *fond* 4, *opis'* 106, *delo* 90, *listy* 93–111.
6. Ibid. Most roads in the remote Russian countryside are not paved; heavy rains in the spring and fall make them impassable due to mud. —Ed.
7. Ibid.
8. *Uralskii rabochii*, 1 October 1976.

to new feats in the name of building communism. The interview of the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU was met with enormous interest by the world community.[9]

One-third of local press coverage was devoted to commentary on different workers' initiatives, all of which aimed at improving the quality and quantity of production. Awards ceremonies took up a lot of space: Andrei Pavlovich Kirilenko, for example, was decorated with no less than the Order of Lenin and his second gold medal of the Hammer and Sickle. *Uralskii rabochii* devoted two full pages to the event as a reward to the man who had been the First Secretary of the Sverdlovsk *obkom* from 1955 to 1962, then a Central Committee secretary, and, finally, a member of the Politburo—the very pinnacle of the Soviet hierarchy.

At the time, the province had approximately four million inhabitants, but only a small minority worked in agriculture—all the more reason for the feat of Sverdlovsk peasants not to go unnoticed back at the Kremlin. Brezhnev personally sent a message of congratulations to the province for having fulfilled its "socialist obligations" of mandatory grain, potato, and vegetable sales to the state.[10] The provincial leadership of the CPSU organized a rally and First Secretary Iakov Riabov took to the streets to share his joy with the people:

> We assure the Leninist Central Committee of the CPSU, and you, beloved Leonid Il'ich, that the workers of the central Urals shall close ranks even tighter around their dear Communist Party and Soviet government and shall devote all their strength, knowledge, and experience to putting the historic decisions of the Twenty-Fifth Congress of the CPSU into practice . . . in the name of the triumph of communism.[11]

The following year, Brezhnev once again congratulated Sverdlovsk for its agricultural output.[12] Yeltsin, by then *obkom* First Secretary, expressed his gratitude to the Soviet leader and organized a rally under the motto, "heroism of the masses."

In late October 1976, the Central Committee of the CPSU met in Moscow for a routine plenary session to approve the economic plan and the state budget for 1977. When the plenum elected Iakov Riabov a secretary of the Central Committee, it opened the door to the Soviet elite to him. Riabov left Sverdlovsk bound for Moscow, just as every other triumphant person from his province had left before him. His replacement, Boris Yeltsin, who was hastily being trained at the Higher Party School in Moscow, had already been appointed. On 2 November 1976 the plenary session of the Sverdlovsk *obkom* echoed the will of the Politburo and elected Boris Yeltsin its First Secretary.

Other things were occurring in the world. The United States elected Jimmy Carter president and Czechoslovakia decorated Leonid Brezhnev with his second Hero of Czechoslovakia Gold Star as well as the Order of Clement Gottwald. The Sverdlovsk press had its own story

9. *Uralskii rabochii*, 7 October 1976.
10. *Uralskii rabochii*, 19 October 1976.
11. *Uralskii rabochii*, 19 October 1976. The message was sent to Brezhnev from the Sverdlovsk *obkom* of the CPSU.
12. *Uralskii rabochii*, 26 October 1977.

priorities. Carter's election was worthy only of a note from TASS, the official news agency of the USSR, hidden on an inside page, while Brezhnev's decorations were given huge front-page headlines. Somewhere in between these two items appeared the election notice of Boris Yeltsin, the man who would preside over political rituals in the province from that point on.[13]

To sweeten the new leader's entry in the local communist leadership, *Uralskii rabochii* dedicated an article to the First Secretary's home town, Butka, then celebrating the three hundredth anniversary of its founding in 1676 by Ivashko Silvents and Tirëzhka Ivanov, builders of the town's wooden fort.[14] The daily newspaper said Butka was one of the oldest settlements in the region (47 years older than Ekaterinburg) and an outpost of the Russian empire during the conquest of Siberia. Little by little it had grown to a population of 5,000 inhabitants. It was a prosperous town with a tapestry factory (that even produced for export), starch and cooking oil factories, and a swine-breeding *sovkhoz*.

Far away from Butka and the idyllic life of Sverdlovsk province in the Urals was the capitalist world. According to the local press, it was conspiring against the USSR, encouraged by a "band of plotters and assassins" in the CIA and the western media (which was in the "lie production" business).[15] At the time Yeltsin assumed the provincial Party leadership, one message was being drilled into everyone's head day in and day out: capitalism was rotting, on its way to inevitable demise, while history was proving socialism to be superior in all areas of life. The picture the provincial press painted of local society was a carbon copy miniature of the world image reflected in the central press. The Communist Party and its gigantic swarm of officials and propaganda-makers conjured up this mirage and fed it with figures, campaigns, medals, accolades, bombastic phrases, and primitive rituals. Eventually, they became caught up in their own lies from repeating them so much.

III. The Communist Party in the Provinces

The Frame of the Pyramid

The organizers of this fiction were divided up into a hierarchical ruling caste known as the *nomenklatura*. The structure of this ruling elite could be depicted as a system of pyramids that diminished in importance as one moved down from the Central Committee of the CPSU—the pyramid at the top of the hierarchy. The *nomenklatura* did its best to keep its structure airtight, sensing that truth would have the same pulverizing effect on its existence as would air on pharaonic mummies in a freshly opened sarcophagus.

The Communist Party ran absolutely every institution of Soviet society—absolutely nothing could prosper without its approval. In accordance with the provisions of Article 6 of the USSR Constitution of 1977, the CPSU performed its ruling function through a clever system of networking. All positions of any importance were ultimately

13. *Uralskii rabochii*, 3 November 1976.
14. "Butke 300 let," *Uralskii rabochii*, 3 November 1976.
15. *Uralskii rabochii*, 26 October 1976.

subordinate to the Communist Party structure, no matter where they were located or how the officeholder had obtained his or her position.

The strict rules of operation of the *nomenklatura* constituted one of the occult sciences of the Communist Party. Starting from the bottom and moving up the hierarchical ladder of power in order of importance were the district (*raionnaia*) *nomenklatura*, followed by the city or urban (*gorodskaia*) *nomenklatura*, followed by the *nomenklatura* of the provincial (*oblastnaia* or *kraevaia*) Party committee, and lastly, the *nomenklatura* of the Central Committee in Moscow. At the height of the Gorbachev era, the Central Committee needed a secret manual (of restricted circulation and numbered copies) in order to keep track of the alphabet soup of positions controlled by the CPSU.[16]

In addition to this vertical chain of command, the *nomenklatura* had other, internal divisions. These divisions formed a capillary network that penetrated every part of society. The division between basic (*osnovnaia*) and management (*uchëtno–kontrol'naia*) *nomenklatura* overlapped with the division between appointed and elected *nomenklatura*. In this way, the Party made sure that nothing remained outside of its network. A Communist Party official belonged to the basic *nomenklatura* of the organization that had appointed him and, at the same time, to the management *nomenklatura* of the organization just above it in the hierarchy, whose duty it was to confirm and make a record of his appointment. The appointed *nomenklatura* was made up of the fixed positions of the Communist Party apparatus, while the elected *nomenklatura* was comprised of those positions to which individuals were formally "elected" after being "recommended" by the Party.

To work one's way up the ladder, the basic *nomenklatura* was what really mattered. Although the secretaries of the Communist Party organization in Sverdlovsk belonged to the basic *nomenklatura* of the Central Committee, there was a subtle difference among them in hierarchy. The First Secretary of the province was appointed by the Politburo—in other words, he belonged to the *nomenklatura* of the highest collective organization of the CPSU—while the other secretaries were appointed by the Secretariat of the Central Committee—in other words, they were a step down.

The Communist Party organization was like an orthopedic device: an artificial pumping system that replaced and suppressed other, more natural, and more spontaneous stimuli. The organizational fever of the CPSU permeated every level of the Party, that is, at the core of every committee there was another committee. The situation became so distorted that when Mikhail Gorbachev subsequently began the process of political democratization, the CPSU tried to organize itself inside the Supreme Soviet of the USSR as a party group instead of a parliamentary faction,[17] as Valentin Falin, a secretary of the Central

16. "Nomenklatura dolzhnostei TsK KPSS po sostoianiiu na 1 dekabria 1987 g," 333 pages. Materials from the trial of the CPSU (Moscow: Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, 1992.)

17. "O nekotorikh voprosov raboty s narodnami deputatami SSSR," Protocol No. 164, Poliburo meeting of 8 September 1989, Rossiiskii tsentr khraneniia i uzycheniia dokumentov noveishei istorii (RTsKhIDNI), Moscow.

Committee, had proposed to Gorbachev.[18]

The true nerve center of the Party was its permanent apparatus of functionaries, who were divided into departments that oversaw all aspects of local life. There were five secretaries at the head of this apparatus in the Sverdlovsk *obkom*, with the First Secretary enjoying highest rank. Each secretary was in charge of a certain number of departments; together, they comprised the *obkom* Secretariat. In addition, there existed a Buro, an organ in which the five secretaries were joined by several other officials, including the commander of the Military District of the Urals, the president of the executive committee of the provincial soviet (the permanent structure of the provincial legislature, which had certain executive functions), the provincial chief of the Committee of State Security (KGB), and the head of the labor unions in the province.[19] The Buro had its own, distinct ceremonies:

> When meetings began, the First Secretary shook hands with the full members and bowed his head to the candidate members. Participants in these meetings were rigorously dressed in suits and ties, no matter how hot the weather. Yeltsin did not tolerate casual dress and if someone dared to arrive without a suit coat, he would send the person home to change clothes.[20]

The *obkom* structure was a smaller version of that of the CPSU Central Committee in Moscow. The Buro and the provincial Secretariat were the local counterparts of the Politburo and the Secretariat of the Central Committee. That is to say, they were the organs that actually wielded power—they were permanent and controlled the Party apparatus. Nominally a kind of internal parliament that elected itself approximately every two years in provincial conferences of the CPSU, the *obkom*'s parliamentary function was purely for show, limited to confirming (generally by a show of hands) whatever the Buro and Secretariat proposed. Despite the appearance of power, the Sverdlovsk *obkom* had to request permission from Moscow for even the most trivial things. In 1984, for example, second secretary Oleg Lobov had to address the Central Committee simply to hire a cleaning lady.[21]

The five provincial secretaries' duties remained quite stable during Yeltsin's nine years in office. Nevertheless, from time to time changes were introduced and departments were transferred from the purview of one secretary to that of another. As top leader, Yeltsin oversaw the Department of Organizational Party Work, the agency in charge of the personnel files of Communist Party members and the selection of personnel; the General Department, which guarded classified materials,

18. Letter of Valentin Falin to Mikhail Gorbachev, 21 September 1990, RTsKhIDNI.

19. At the Twenty-Third Sverdlovsk *Oblast'* Party Conference in 1984, eleven full and five candidate members were elected to the Buro. Among the first category was a worker; among the second, the head of the local KGB. "Protokol XXIII oblastnoi partiinoi konferentsii, 20–21 January 1984," TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 107, *delo* 1.

20. Grigorii Kaeta in conversation with the author, Ekaterinburg, October 1992.

21. See note of Oleg Lobov to the Central Committee of the CPSU, 13 September 1984, TsDOOSO.

monitored documents, and delivered them to the records section; and the Party Commission. In addition, Yeltsin supposedly "managed" military activity in the *oblast'*.[22] He was also responsible for "general management" of the KGB in the province (in practice, this was political management) and the enterprises of *Minsredmash*, the gigantic institution responsible for wartime use of nuclear energy.

The CPSU organizations in the secret cities involved in the atomic war industry, Sverdlovsk–44 and Sverdlovsk–45, were also directly accountable to Yeltsin, as were political leaders of the executive structure of the provincial soviet, labor unions, the provincial People's Control Committee (an institution elected by the soviets, a sort of consumers' rights and state inspection agency at the same time), and the Komsomol (Communist Youth Organization).

Throughout the time he occupied the post of First Secretary, Yeltsin not only retained all of this authority, he even expanded it by accumulating functions that other secretaries had performed previously. Specifically, he awarded himself the position of representative of the State Planning Committee, or Gosplan, as well as oversight of the Department of Finance and Economics.[23]

In descending order of importance, the first secretary was followed by a second secretary, who in 1977 was responsible for heavy industry and defense production, transportation, communications, machinery building, economic and financial matters of the CPSU, and the work of planning organs and "*shtaby*" (specific-action coordinating teams) that provided aid to the countryside. Among the three second secretaries with whom Yeltsin coexisted as the highest government official in Sverdlovsk, Oleg Lobov (who later became Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation), was closest to him. Both were construction engineers and their personal friendship went back to 1971, when they travelled to Sweden and Finland together.[24]

Next in line in the hierarchy was the secretary in charge of ideological matters. This secretary kept watch over the departments of Propaganda and Agitation; Science and Educational Institutions; Culture; and Administrative Organs. He also oversaw the local branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Party archives, sports, health, and social matters.

Through the Department of Administrative Organs, the "number three" secretary maintained the *obkom*'s institutional relations with the KGB, the ministries of Internal Affairs and Justice, the procurator's office, and the judiciary. It was also this secretary's job to "maintain an ongoing relationship and cooperate" with the Military District of the Urals and "other military units

22. At the time, Sverdlovsk *oblast'* was a part of the Military District (*okrug*) of the Urals. Yeltsin, who received the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1976 and colonel in 1978, was a member of the corresponding Military Council of the Urals.

23. Protocol, Meeting of the Secretariat of the Buro of the Sverdlovsk *obkom*, 28 February 1977, TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 89, *delo* 22, *list* 3; and Protocol, Meeting of Secretariat of the Buro of the Sverdlovsk *obkom*, 1 April 1985, TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 111, *delo* 66, *list* 17. Both documents are signed by Yeltsin.

24. Oleg Lobov in conversation with the author, Moscow, 15 December 1992.

located on provincial territory,"[25] as well as to direct volunteer militia units.[26] Independent of the *obkom*, Party organizations in military units located in Sverdlovsk *oblast'* were subordinate to the Political Administration of the Army, which had a rank equivalent to that of a department of the CPSU Central Committee.

The fourth *obkom* secretary dealt with construction and the construction materials industry, public works, the distribution of housing, and the timber and paper industries. During Yeltsin's time, the fifth and last secretary was in charge of agriculture, light industry, and the food industry (including vodka and soft drink production), farm machinery enterprises, and trade.[27]

Aside from their institutional responsibilities, the secretaries promoted specific programs. The secretary for ideology, for example, directed a working group tasked with counterpropaganda; the secretary for agriculture, a program for the development of small vegetable gardens attached to enterprises; the secretary for construction, a plan for the demolition of barracks.[28]

Those social groups that the Party considered most significant were represented on the *obkom* itself, with the proportional representation of each group determined by the Department of Organizational Party Work. The body thus grouped together directors of the most important factories, managers of military enterprises, war veterans, army officers, KGB officials, workers, and peasants. The *obkom* acted in the belief that efficient penetration of the soviets, labor unions, youth organizations, social organizations, factories, collective farms, trade—indeed, all spheres of life—by members of the Communist Party would make society work according to the directives of the CPSU.

The actual number of *obkom* members depended on the number of active Party members in the *oblast'*. In 1984, for example, there were 143 full and 59 candidate members of the Sverdlovsk *obkom*.[29] (Corresponding numbers for the total number of full-fledged and candidate members of the Sverdlovsk Communist Party organization as a whole were 220,556 in 1976 and 265,524 in 1986.[30]) The combined *nomenklatura* of the provincial, city, and district Party committees of the province in 1983, however, totalled almost 20,000 people, including officials of the Communist Party and the soviets, as well as leaders of

25. Protocol, Meeting of the Secretariat of the Sverdlovsk *obkom*, 1 April 1985, TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 111, *delo* 66, *listy* 18–19. The protocol is signed by Yeltsin.

26. These volunteer units, known as *druzhinniki*, were a support group to the forces of law and order who identified themselves with red arm bands. They principally devoted their energies to picking up drunks.

27. In the event that direct control of all economic activity was not sufficient, the CPSU duplicated its oversight by using the provincial soviet apparatus. The soviets had no choice but to implement the decisions of the CPSU through its executive structure and accept formal responsibility for these decisions.

28. Protocol No. 18, Meeting of the Secretariat of the Sverdlovsk *obkom*, 1 April 1985, TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 111, *delo* 66, *listy* 17–20.

29. "Protokol XXIII oblastnoi partiinoi konferentsii."

30. Statistics on Communist Party Militancy, TsDOOSO.

enterprises and other institutions.[31] This last figure reflected the number of provincial positions requiring the approval of the CPSU, not the group directly on the Party payroll. According to former *obkom* administrative officials, the latter group was much smaller, numbering just over 500 people at the end of Yeltsin's term.

When Yeltsin first became head of the *obkom*, the body had a total of 14 departments. By the end of 1984, during the final months of his stay in Sverdlovsk, there were 22 organs within the *obkom*: 17 departments, the Party Commission (a sort of internal disciplinary tribunal[32]), as well as a records department, the Higher Party School, the editorial staff of the newspaper *Uralskii rabochii*, and a publishing house of the same name. The total number of provincial Party committee employees in that year was 216.[33]

The number of employees in each department, ranging from 33 in the Department of Organizational Party Work to 4 in the Department of Culture, did not necessarily indicate the significance of a department's specialization. The Department of Defense, for example, formally had a very small staff because it was limited to supervising cadres dispersed throughout local industry. These cadres were in turn managed by a group of ministries comprising the military–industrial complex. The true nature of these ministries remained hidden behind long strings of syllables that supposedly abbreviated their names. *Minobshchemash*, for example, was the Ministry of General Machine Building; *Minaviaprom*, the Ministry of the Aviation Industry; *Minelektroprom*, the Ministry of the Electric Industry; and *Minsredmash*, the Ministry of Medium Machine Building, which, as previously mentioned, was actually responsible for atomic energy. These and many other ministries had their own people who watched out for their interests in strictly military enterprises, as well as in many other enterprises partially involved in the military–industrial sector.[34]

Sealed File Cabinets

The Department of Organizational Party Work, over which Yeltsin had direct control, ensured—to put it plainly—the perpetuation of the ruling class in power. This department maintained files on Communist Party officials that were prepared in compliance with general directives of the Central Committee. Every official of the *nomenklatura* had his or her own personnel file in this department which, together with secret papers, was kept in noncombustible, or metallic, cabinets that were locked up at the end of each work day.[35]

31. Speech of Boris Yeltsin at Sverdlovsk *obkom* meeting of 21 February 1983, TsDOOSO, *fond* 279, *opis'* 1, *delo* 236, *list* 26.

32. This body was known alternatively as the "Party Commission" or the "Party Control Commission" during different periods of Soviet history.

33. "Spisok rabotnikov Sverdlovskogo obkoma KPSS" (Sverdlovsk: Uralskii Rabochii Publishers, 20 November 1984.) This document was a sheet of paper that listed *obkom* employees names, positions, and telephone numbers; officials generally kept it under the glass on their desks at work.

34. In addition, the regional affiliate of the Academy of Sciences, the Polytechnic Institute of the Urals, together with other technical institutions of higher education in the province had both overt and covert sections that worked for the defense industry.

These files could not be taken out of the *obkom* and contained references concerning the Party member in question that were signed by the *obkom* secretary with the proper authority. This file, updated no less than once every five years and ratified each time an individual received a professional promotion or travelled abroad, was supposed to contain information on an individual's "defects" as well as comments on his or her ability to overcome them. (In Yeltsin's file, or *kharakteristika*, which remains stored in Sverdlovsk, there appears an allusion to his poor character.)

In the *kharakteristika*, Party members were supposed to specify their social extraction, nationality, and details about stays overseas, as well as draft autobiographical notes explaining the reasons for changes of domicile. These hand-written documents piled up over the years in each Communist Party official's file and reflected their hesitancy to remember, their obligation to report, and, perhaps, their desire not to report. [36] Communist Party members were also supposed to give information on their relatives; that is, to indicate if they were Party members, their level of education, and whether or not they had a criminal record. Yeltsin, for example, did not indicate whether or not his father belonged to the CPSU, nor did he mention that his father had been convicted. The father of Gennadii Burbulis, however, did put on record that he had a brother in prison and another who had been convicted of illegal possession of firearms.

The General Department—notorious for being the best informed—was in charge of documents, classified information, photocopy machines, admittance passes to the *obkom* building, and shifts of the security detail in the First Secretary's reception room. This department monitored all movement of documents, lending them only to those authorized to use them, and acted as the custodian of all records and minutes of conferences, plenary sessions, meetings of Party members, the Buro, and the Secretariat. The department also ordered seals and stamps for Party committees, as well as Party cards for individual Party members.

Minutes of the meetings of the ruling organs of the CPSU were kept secret: it was forbidden to make copies of them, quote them in the press, or even mention them in the documents of the soviets, the labor unions, the Komsomol, or economic institutions. In this way, the CPSU could recant on decisions without leaving any troublesome clues behind, making it impossible to prove any wrongdoing with documentary evidence.

The responsibilities of the chief of the General Department justified his carrying a pistol. In 1981, both the pistol and the chief, Vladimir Titov, disappeared in Sverdlovsk. It was a very unsavory scandal that eventually gave rise to suspicion of alleged infiltration by foreign intelligence services. Titov had been

35. "Rekomendatsii po uchotu kadrov, vkhodiashchikh v nomenklaturu obkoma, gorkomov, raikomov KPSS," 1987, TsDOOSO.

36. It is precisely in these autobiographical notes that Boris Yeltsin explained what happened to his family for two years in Kazan' after his father changed jobs. Who knows why Yeltsin refers to his wife by the name of Anastasia on one occasion and as Naina on others? Who knows why Yeltsin made a mistake when he gave the dates of his stay in Kazan' as a child?

Yeltsin's aid from 1977 to 1979 and, prior to that, an instructor at the Department of Heavy Industry. His body appeared in a swamp many months later; his death, termed a suicide, was never cleared up.

The Paper Jungle

When Iurii Andropov came to power at the end of 1982, the Party began to seek out qualified professionals who could work energetically and shake off the inertia created by a bureaucratic type who was self-complacent, compliant, and had a taste for the bourgeois life. Alas, it wasn't easy to find the new people they needed with the help of the Party's personnel files because the *kharakteristiki* contained misrepresentations of fact and did not reflect the true qualities and shortcomings of functionaries, as Yeltsin himself acknowledged.[37] The CPSU thus found itself caught up in its own lies.

The bureaucrats themselves were lost in a sea of redundant resolutions on the same subjects and made an effort to straighten out the mess. It was with great satisfaction that the Sverdlovsk *obkom* in summer 1983 announced a drop in the number of instructions issued by the Buro and the Secretariat: from 120 in 1979 to 92 in 1984. The joy didn't appear to last for long. By 1984, Yeltsin confessed that the number of instructions, commissions, and soviets was multiplying at an alarming rate. In one factory that employed 1,200 people, 500 employees sat on 90 different commissions.[38]

Generating more and more paperwork was a way to keep everyone busy for the sake of keeping busy. Officials on the provincial committee would, on their own initiative, often overload subordinate agencies and economic institutions with countless requests for reports. In this way, the *obkom* would receive 10,000 supplementary documents each year in addition to those prepared in the normal course of business.[39] To make its way through this paper jungle, the *obkom* eventually requested its departments to kindly provide an extract of previous orders on the same subject whenever they proposed an initiative.[40]

The study of reality was replaced by a zeal to organize; the purpose of the organizational fever was to submit the most inflated statistics possible to the higher organs of the CPSU.

Socialist Legality

The CPSU held the concept of "socialist legality" over and above the concept of "justice" and, at the very top of the hierarchy of institutions that enforced "socialist legality," sat the KGB. Its chief in Sverdlovsk was appointed by the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the CPSU, that is to say, he belonged to the basic *nomenklatura* of the Central Committee. Although politically, he was below the First

37. Boris Yeltsin, Sverdlovsk *obkom* meeting, 21 February 1983, TsDOOSO, *fond* 279, *opis'* 1, *delo* 136, *listy* 38 and passim.

38. "Protokol XXIII oblastnoi partiinoi konferentsii."

39. "O sostoianii raboty s dokumentami, kontrolia i proverki ispolneniia v apparate obkoma KPSS," note to Protocol No. 31, meeting of the Secretariat of the Sverdlovsk *obkom*, 15 August 1983, TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 106, *delo* 65, *listy* 55–60.

40. Ibid. See also CPSU Central Committee resolution, "O dopolnitel'nikh merakh po ulusheniiu raboty s dokumentami, povysheniiu kontrolia i proverki ikh vypolneniia v apparate TsK KPSS," 10 June 1983, TsDOOSO.

Secretary of the *oblast'* Party committee, who belonged to the *nomenklatura* of the Politburo, the Secretariat's appointment of the province's highest-ranking KGB officer afforded the latter a position of independence. Since this officer, like the First Secretary, was subordinate to the Central Committee, he could interact with the First Secretary with a certain freedom enjoyed by none of the other top provincial chiefs (the local heads of the Procuracy, the courts, and the ministries of Justice and Internal Affairs were all confirmed in their posts by lower levels of the *nomenklatura* hierarchy). Without understanding this crucial information, it is impossible to understand the true interaction of power inside the provincial Communist Party elite and the subordinate role played by law in the Soviet system as a whole.

This well-defined scheme of interdependence between apparently unlinked institutions was kept secret from many officials of the Communist Party. Institutionally speaking, the provincial organization of the KGB, like the provincial representatives of the ministries of Internal Affairs and Justice, the Procuracy, and the courts, interacted with the Party through the Department of Administrative Organs. Under the aegis of this agency fell, among other things, oversight of the bar association, notary publics, penal institutions, fire departments, the training academy and Party organs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, recruitment centers of the armed forces, paramilitary organizations, civil defense, war veterans, police stations, and the Commission on Travel to Foreign Countries.

Although the KGB was perceived—correctly—as one of many special institutions under the watch of the Department of Administrative Organs, it performed investigations and surveillance through its own covert channels without recourse to the Party. The institutional links between the KGB and the CPSU took place at the vertex of the provincial Party structure: the First Secretary of the *obkom* could demand information on events in the province from the head of the KGB, who was obligated to provide the information. However, the KGB chief was also subordinate to his own committee in Moscow through a parallel chain of command completely outside the provincial leader's sphere of influence.

Lower down on the hierarchical ladder, the apparatus of the *obkom* and the apparatus of the KGB performed parallel tasks without getting in each other's way, but also without exchanging information. The KGB did not usually resort to using the institutional mechanisms of the Party. One official who worked in the provincial records repository of the CPSU for decades claimed that the KGB had not once come to him to check a protocol. "They had their own investigative sections," he explained to the author during an interview.[41]

Although the KGB would respond to the requests of the First Secretary or, on its own initiative, submit reports for his consideration, it did not have the day-to-day obligations of the local organs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. (The Department of Administrative

41. Interview with anonymous former Communist Party official, Ekaterinburg, August 1992.

Organs filed a daily report, written by the local representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, with the *obkom* First Secretary on the latest events in the *oblast'*.)

Relations between the First Secretary and the chief of the KGB were similar to relations between an ambassador and the head of an espionage mission under diplomatic cover: for the most part, it depended on the personal rapport between the two. "Everyone in the Buro knew that he [the chairman of the local KGB] was accountable not only to me. We all knew that it was among his duties to brief Moscow without consulting anyone else," affirmed Iakov Riabov, former First Secretary of the Sverdlovsk *obkom*. Riabov never found out whether or not the KGB had filed complaints to Moscow against him or other provincial officials. On the other hand, he pointed out that the chief of the KGB briefed him on his subordinates' activities. "But in addition to briefing me, he could brief Moscow without consulting me, because he was obliged to do so," he explained.[42]

Relations with the KGB were governed by a strict hierarchy. Although the Department of Organizational Party Work could request personnel files from the KGB to verify the background of anyone within its ranks, the KGB did not necessarily provide the information. Everything depended on how high in the *nomenklatura* stood the person requesting the information *vis-à-vis* the target of the investigation. The Buro would sometimes give its consent for a Communist Party or Komsomol member to go to work for the KGB (such transfers were considered prestigious). Before becoming chief of the KGB in the province, for example, Iurii Kornilov had been Party secretary of a district (*raion*) of the city of Sverdlovsk.

IV. The Life of the Elite

The Communist Bourgeoisie

"It's high time Party workers stopped parading through the *obkom* building with handbags, boxes, and shopping bags," said Boris Yeltsin, addressing 175 Communist Party members who had been assembled to examine the level of discipline among *oblast'* leaders.[43] The First Secretary was referring to scarce consumer goods that Communist Party officials could purchase cheaply at the *obkom* discount store. Yeltsin did not censure this practice of the privileged few, he was simply concerned about what ordinary citizens would think and say if they happened see officials carting around such purchases.

The year was 1983: Andropov had come to power and, with him, his campaign for Party discipline and social order had come to Sverdlovsk. Noted Yeltsin,

> And look what's happening in the office of admittance on Fridays. Starting at 5:00 p.m., relatives and friends begin arriving to see our workers at the latters' request. At that hour, one finds outsiders (*postoronnie liudi*) here, people who have come to the *obkom* for a reception or on other business. This must be put to a stop.[44]

The Communist officials of Sverdlovsk constituted a sort of local

42. Iakov Riabov in conversation with the author, Moscow, October 1992.

43. Speech of Boris Yeltsin to Sverdlovsk Party *obkom* meeting, 21 February 1983, TsDOOSO, *fond* 279, *opis'* 1, *delo* 136, *list* 49.

44. Ibid., 50.

bourgeoisie, a relatively well-off class with their own little vices and privileges that, on a smaller scale, mirrored the privileges of the Communist bourgeoisie in Moscow. Andropov's discipline campaign upset their comfort. The families of Communist bureaucrats had, for example, grown accustomed to using official cars for personal reasons. School principals, said Yeltsin, were complaining that many children went to school in their fathers' chauffeur-driven Volgas. In the First Secretary's opinion, this practice inflicted enormous moral harm on privileged and unprivileged schoolchildren alike—those who had to ride the streetcar compared themselves with those got to ride in Volgas.[45]

Another deep-rooted vice among the local ruling class during the time of Brezhnev was "dacha and garden sickness." According to Yeltsin, this sickness reached "epidemic" proportions in Sverdlovsk in 1983. The First Secretary reprimanded those subordinates who devoted most of their energy and ingenuity to thinking up ways of making their dachas, or country houses, better than those of their neighbors, reproaching them for using their positions to obtain construction materials at discounted prices or simply for free, as well as for diverting highly qualified specialists and their assistants away from their regular jobs.

It wasn't the first time the CPSU had discussed abuses of power and violations of rules governing collective garden plots and the construction of dachas. Such abuses had been dealt with in 1981, but by 1983, related Yeltsin, "new abuses" had been detected and police records filed against 43 leaders.[46] He criticized in particular a director of a construction trust who had built a two-floor country house with a total of 82 square meters of living space—three times the regulation size. The official later sold the house, said Yeltsin, but thanks to his position, became a member of another collective garden (*kollektivnyi sad*) two months later and began to build himself two more houses with materials from his company. Despite a warning from the district committee of the CPSU, the official continued to manage the construction company.

Whatever the official ideology, the *apparatchiki* of the Soviet system never lacked business acumen or a feel for the market. Instead of putting up used state cars for sale to the public, for example, as they were supposed to do, directors of enterprises would arbitrarily sell the vehicles or, in many cases, keep them for themselves. Once Yeltsin took stock of the whereabouts of 837 cars that had been sold within the *oblast'*. It turned out that 160 had been bought by enterprise directors; 264, by engineers and technicians; 93, by private drivers; 31, by officials of administrative agencies; 13, by officials of the soviets; and 10, by officials of the CPSU; another 10 had left the province altogether.[47] A total of 488 cars—that is, more than half the original number—never reached

45. TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 101, *delo* 86, *list* 45.

46. TsDOOSO, *fond* 279, *opis'* 1, *delo* 136, *list* 33.

47. Ibid., 34.

the lines of people patiently awaiting their turn for just one car.[48]

The Communist Party was the leading force of society and therefore in a privileged position regarding the delivery of goods and services; the *obkom* was the first to receive new cars and simultaneously turned over used cars to the soviets. This was standard practice during Yeltsin's term as *obkom* First Secretary. The *obkom* Secretariat was thoughtful enough to deem new cars fit and old ones unfit as if they were two separate, unconnected categories. In one session of the Secretariat, as if one had nothing to do with the other, two separate items were recorded on the agenda: the delivery of "new cars" to members of different city Party committees of the province and the generous delivery to various soviets of cars deemed unfit for use by Party organs. Likewise, *gorkomy* that happened to receive new cars would send, as if a generous gift, vehicles that had been in circulation on the province's bumpy highways for six, seven, or even eight years to the provincial soviet for "further use in the national economy."[49] Judging from the number of full-time employees at the garage, the largest department of the *obkom*, the CPSU took very good care of its cars; more than 80 people worked there, including over 50 chauffeurs and mechanics.

Clinic No. 2

The caste-based society Yeltsin directed was so strictly regimented, and in such great detail, that it did not allow for the slightest chance of improvisation. This regimentation was demonstrated by the rules for Clinic No. 2, the clinic that provided health care for the *nomenklatura* of the province.[50] The roster of state and Party positions entitled to treatment at this clinic read exactly like a chart of the local power hierarchy. The Communist Party elite, which included members of the *obkom* Buro and the chairman of the provincial soviet, comprised the "preferred" (*vne kategorii*) group; the remainder of those eligible to use the clinic were divided into three categories. The first category consisted of officials who had the right to use the clinic together with all members of their families; the second, of officials who could use the clinic together with their dependents and those family members with whom they resided; and the third, of officials without the right to bring any family member whatsoever to the clinic.

The list of social groups included in the first category represented the innermost circle of the local elite. Headed by the department chiefs of the *obkom*, this group included the secretaries of the Party committee of the city of Sverdlovsk, the vice-presidents and members of the executive committee

48. These examples of "awarded" cars foreshadowed a trend that would, many years later, become deep-rooted during the privatization process, a process known as "*nomenklatura* privatization" in post-communist Russia. The plan for diversification of Soviet property during the early stages of privatization was as easy as the awarding of cars in Sverdlovsk *oblast'*: managers of public property or, in some instances, simply those who had access to this property, awarded it to themselves before it could be put up for public sale or submitted to the legal process of privatization.

49. TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 106, *delo* 63.

50. "Predlozhenie po kontingentu oblastnoi bol'nitsy no. 2," 27 April 1979, TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 95, *delo* 170.

of the *oblast'* soviet, the chairman of the *oblast'* soviet of the labor unions, the chief of the provincial People's Control, the First Secretary of the Komsomol, the director-general of the *Uralmash* factory, the chief of *Glavsreduralstroi*, as well as the chairman of the Presidium of the Urals Scientific Center of the USSR Academy of Sciences, the editor of *Uralskii rabochii*, and the *oblast'* chairman of the KGB.

The second category was made up of deputies to the Supreme Soviets of both the USSR and the Russian Republic, recipients of the Hero of Socialist Labor and Hero of the USSR awards; recipients of the Lenin Prize and other state prizes; leaders of social organizations; distinguished artists, painters and architects—that is, the official "intelligentsia;" ruling officials of the apparatus of the soviets; war veterans; Communist Party members with Party cards issued before 1922; and those who fell into the category of "all-union state retiree."

The category of "republic state retiree" was of lower standing and, together with veterans of World War II, the bulk of the faculty of the Higher Party School, and the technicians and executive committee of the *oblast'* soviet, comprised the third group. Certain additional privileged groups with the right to treatment at different levels were included in each basic category. Faculty members of the Higher Party School, members of the USSR Union of Writers, managers of enterprises, journalists, reporters, and chairpersons of social organizations ranging from the Society of the Friends of Books to the Society of the Deaf, appeared on more than a dozen of these supplementary lists.

The clinic staff, which in 1970 totalled almost 100 people, gradually became larger, reaching almost 750 in 1979. Yet local leaders wanted still more staff, demanding a permanent team of more than 900 people, including more than 200 doctors, to care for 10,188 patients.[51] Two groups of beneficiaries were by their own right the largest. One, comprised of 1,181 people, included members of the basic *nomenklatura* and the staff of the *obkom* (officials in charge of Party organizations, soviets, labor unions, the Komsomol, and other institutions); the other, made up of 2,170 people, consisted of chief officers of the *gorkom*, the executive committee of the *oblast'* soviet, and other organizations not included in the *oblastnaia nomenklatura*. If one adds the almost 6,000 family members of these two groups, several hundred Communist Party veterans and their families, retirees of both the all-union and republic categories who received health care at Clinic no. 2 before retiring, plus the technical workers of the *obkom* and *gorsoviet* (the city soviet), one arrives at the total number of people served by the clinic.

For the mere mortals of Sverdlovsk, health care was quite a different story. The number of doctors in the *oblast'* was below the Russian Republic average. Patients lay in halls and shacks due to lack of space and the state of maternity wards in the city of Sverdlovsk was so poor that women would leave to

51. Letter of A. Mekhrentsev, Chairman, Executive Committee, Sverdlovsk *Oblast'* Soviet, to USSR Minister of Health V. Trofimov; and "Spravka o kontingente Sverdlovskoi oblastnoi bolnitsy no. 2," 27 April 1979, TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 95, *delo* 170, *listy* 191–8.

give birth in the small towns of the surrounding countryside.[52]

V. Yeltsin in Power

Construction in the Oblast'
...The Pipeline

Boris Yeltsin's personality as a leader was apparent first and foremost in the sphere of construction, a profession to which his career had been linked in several enterprises before he became responsible for this sector of the Sverdlovsk *obkom*. Construction works in the province were divided into several categories. Large-scale state plans had top priority, followed by prestigious works aimed at beautifying Sverdlovsk, followed by buildings local leaders insisted on building at any cost, followed, finally, by housing construction programs and the elimination of barracks dwellings. The most important civilian construction company in the province, *Glavsreduralstroi*, had more than 100,000 people on its payroll and manufactured its own materials.

Beginning in 1981, the province of Sverdlovsk participated in the laying of five natural gas pipelines to connect Siberia with the European part of the USSR.[53] The pipelines constituted the main project of the Soviet state during the 1981–86 five-year plan and crossed the taiga forests in the northern part of the province. (Yeltsin regarded the pumping station project as the Urals' response to the sanctions American President Ronald Reagan imposed on the USSR.[54]) The plan required Sverdlovsk to lay 2,000 kilometers of pipe and build 20 pumping stations, all of which required an investment of 1.7 billion rubles.[55] It was an outrageous sum of money at the time, especially when compared to the 85 million rubles allocated for the development of a bauxite mine in 1982, the second most important construction project in the province.

In order to maintain control over important construction projects, an *obkom* would establish so-called "*shtaby*." These were groups of different upper-level officials (from the Communist Party, trade unions, enterprises, etc.) who kept watch over a specific construction site and supplied it with the required materials. *Shtaby* were based on constant surveillance of and individualized pressure on a particular construction site, serving as a reinforcement to the usual orthopedic device that substituted for institutions and normal motivation. In the summer of 1981, for example, Yeltsin himself organized an aerial expedition over the pipeline that had been laid from Urengoi. In the helicopter with Yeltsin rode second *obkom* Party secretary Leonid Bobikin and other top *obkom* leaders Iurii Petrov, Viktor Iliushin, Fëdor Morshchakov, and Oleg Lobov. Except for Bobikin, who later joined the campaign to discredit Yeltsin, all these public

52. Speech of Boris Yeltsin to the Twenty-Third Sverdlovsk *Oblast'* Party Conference, "Protokol XXIII oblastnoi partiinoi konferentsii." (See note 18).

53. The construction of the gas pipeline was realized according to Joint Resolution No. 602 of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the USSR Council of Ministers, 29 June 1981.

54. Speech of Boris Yeltsin to meeting of the *oblast' shtab* on capital construction, TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 1001, *delo* 189, *listy* 164–7.

55. TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 100, *delo* 74, *list* 24.

figures ended up with offices in the Kremlin a decade later.[56]

Before Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, it was also common to use prisoners on construction jobs in the USSR. The practice was both a remnant of the gulag system and the response of an economy detached from any material or moral stimuli. Numerous penal institutions were located within the territory of Sverdlovsk *oblast'*, especially in the northern region, which served as a source of "special labor contingents." The use of prisoners on public works was, however, the cause of great tension between the Ministry of the Interior and local builders who lacked the manpower to carry out their plans. At one point, Evgenii Sushilov, Party leader of Nizhnii Tagil and member of the Sverdlovsk *obkom*, asserted that it was "time to start thinking about limiting the special contingents in construction."[57] According to Sushilov, the Ministry of the Interior had banned the creation of new special labor contingents in light of the tense situation in Nizhnii Tagil. Yet local builders continued to insist that such contingents be created because they were hard-pressed to fulfill planned projects—no doubt due to a lack of manpower—and were unable to use the allocations provided to them by the Council of Ministers for this purpose.

Tension with builders in this second largest city of the province forced *obkom* secretary Oleg Lobov (a veteran Communist Party official who, like Yeltsin, had made his career in construction) to go to Nizhnii Tagil and deliver a harsh reprimand to the managers of local construction companies. One of these builders was Eduard Rossel, who years later would become governor of the province and ideologue of the "Republic of the Urals." At the time, however, Rossel and other local officials were accused of parasitism and having done extremely poor work.

Whether prisoners were actually used to lay the pipeline or not, *Uralenergostroi*, the enterprise in charge of installing the pipeline, at least proposed the idea to the *obkom* construction department as a completely normal practice. In fact, *Uralenergostroi* selected three special labor contingents: 500 Komsomol youths, divided into brigades; between 400 and 500 soldiers, divided into "construction details;" and an undisclosed number of prisoners.[58] Alas, soldiers were much less productive than qualified workers because they had no interest in the work.

...The Opera Theater

On another construction front, in December 1982 Boris Yeltsin managed to cut the inaugural ribbon of the Opera and Ballet Theater of Sverdlovsk according to plan and on time. In his speech, he honored the "great tradition of the builders of Sverdlovsk [who put] one important cultural work into operation each year." A total of 23 enterprises,

56. See list of participants on the inspection flight over the Urengoi–Nizhniaia Tura–Petrovsk pipeline, 26–7 August 1981, TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 100, *delo* 202, *listy* 79–80.

57. TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 106, *delo* 1, *listy* 42–6.

58. The energy enterprise wanted the CPSU to see fit to "order the provincial department of the Ministry of Interior to look into the possibility of organizing a special command team on the construction site for the pumping station of Krasnoturinsk," TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 100, *delo* 202, *listy* 84–7.

including the most important in the province, had taken part in the reconstruction of the theater, a building that dated from the turn of the century. The new lighting fixtures came from the military factory *Optika–Mekhanika* and the marble, from *Uralmramor*. It had been the job of a *shtab* of more than fifty people to harass these enterprises which, as usual, had delayed the realization of building plans for the theater.

Construction projects such as the opera theater entailed a certain degree of risk for provincial leaders because authorities in Moscow did not permit appropriations from the center to be reallocated according to local whim. In general, Moscow opposed initiatives of the provinces that diverted funds earmarked for state plans. Yeltsin, however, figured out how to convince local enterprises to contribute to the general well-being of the city without detriment to state plans.

...Other Construction

Not all construction projects ended as successfully as the opera theater. When he departed the province, Riabov bequeathed to Yeltsin 346 kilometers of a half-built highway connecting Sverdlovsk to the city of Serov. The first north–south artery in the province, the highway was considered to have great strategic importance. Called the "little BAM," it was as important to Sverdlovsk as the Baikal–Amur railway had been to the exploitation of Siberia. Yeltsin failed to finish the project. In fact, from the time it was begun during Riabov's term as *obkom* First Secretary until it opened in November 1985 (during Petrov's term), the highway took 20 years to complete. Since the project was not a part of the state plan, the highway was built with money from the province—the *obkom* simply calculated the total kilometers and prorated the cost of the highway among its future beneficiaries.

In contrast to the slow pace of the highway construction stood that of the House of the Soviets in the city of Sverdlovsk, the building that would become the headquarters of both the Communist Party and the provincial soviet. Ordered by Moscow, the ambitious project was built and managed by military construction enterprises, not the civilian enterprise *Glavsreduralstroi*. It was in no way concerned with functionality, but rather, prestige: it was meant to be the highest and most central building in the city. Yeltsin, who was secretary of the *obkom* when the work was planned, was particularly interested in underscoring the symbolic value of the building above and beyond its functional value.

In order to engage the services of one of the USSR's most prestigious military builders, Aleksandr Stambulchik—always willing and eager to lend a hand to Communist leaders—*oblast'* authorities had to obtain the direct permission of the USSR Minister of Medium Machine Building, Efim Slavskii. According to Riabov, the minister had been the managing director of an aluminum factory in Sverdlovsk during the war and never caused trouble for Stambulchik, always giving in to what he needed.[59] Dedicated in 1982 precisely according to plan, the new House of the Soviets was a colossal technical mistake. As one observer remarked, "It's completely occupied by elevators and there's hardly any

59. Iakov Riabov in conversation with the author, Moscow, 27 October 1992.

office space."[60] Due to its upright silhouette, the building's popular nicknames became "the Party member" and "the wisdom tooth."

As concerned housing for ordinary citizens of the province, Yeltsin refused to build the five-story panel housing complexes so typical of Soviet cities in the downtown area of Sverdlovsk, insisting that he would build only good-quality housing. In practice, this was the same as saying that the *obkom* was refraining from building such housing in the hope that there would be an opportunity to do so in the future.[61] Although barracks dwellings in the province had been officially demolished in 1983, statistics hid the true state of affairs. In order to cover up the scope of the housing problem, official terminology had created a distinction between two categories of dwellings: "barracks" and "old housing." Instead of demolishing barracks, certain ministries, organizations, and even soviets undertook to rebuild them in order to upgrade them from the lower to the higher category. A group of barracks in the city of Sverdlovsk, for example, was upgraded after being outfitted with just a partition and three new entrances.

Enterprises in the Soviet Union were paternalistic entities that built housing and provided other goods and services to their employees. This paternalism, however, at times verged on the absurd. At the metallurgical factory of Alapaevsk, for example, enterprise housing units were found to be in worse shape than the barracks slated for demolition.[62]

Of Agriculture and the Food Situation

In 1983 the crisis in the supply of basic foods had reached such proportions in the province that a drop in the sale of margarine, eggs, tea, macaroni, and potatoes was confirmed.[63] In order to combat the scarcity of food supplies, the CPSU stepped up political indoctrination, or *agitprop*, among store employees and blamed the urban and district Party committees for doing a poor propaganda job. It also decreed that the central core of the CPSU and the Komsomol be strengthened in the area of commerce and that the construction of socialism be perfected. In this way, perhaps, the stores would become filled with groceries.

Boris Yeltsin organized peasant markets in Sverdlovsk and, in fall 1982, even convened a produce fair.[64] Markets in Sverdlovsk were held on boggy sites, without storage or refrigeration. Most stands were exposed to the elements, with no place for vendors to eat hot meals. The provincial buro of the CPSU, its collective brain seemingly constrained by the usual orthopedic device, attributed this regrettable scene to a lack of involvement of Communist Party members. (Of the

60. Sergei Vozdvizhenskii in conversation with the author, Ekaterinburg, 3 February 1994.

61. Speech of Boris Yeltsin on Sverdlovsk *oblast'* television, TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 101, *delo* 86, *list* 34.

62. TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 107, *delo* 102, *listy* 67–9.

63. TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 106, *delo* 65, *listy* 66–72.

64. Years later, he tried to repeat this initiative in Moscow, when he had truckloads of vegetables brought into the capital in what proved to be an economic disaster, as the trucks rode empty for thousands of kilometers on their way home.

50 directors of *kolkhoz* markets in the province, only 10 were active Party members.[65])

The Vigilant Eye

In the summer of 1983, no one expected the thaw that would accompany Mikhail Gorbachev's arrival in power. That summer, Boris Yeltsin returned to Sverdlovsk after attending a CPSU ideological plenum convened by Iurii Andropov. He proceeded to set forth the Kremlin's new policy guidelines to the local elite. Declared Yeltsin at the meeting,

> We must decidedly unmask contemporary two-faced Januses and not allow them to get to young people—our most valuable capital. . . . The Party *obkom* understands that we are obliged to guard our theoretical and ideological compass vigilantly and keep it firmly in view, not permitting foreign hands to undermine it with the hatchet of political indifference and ideological vacuity in an attempt to divert us from our proper Leninist course.[66]

The language of the time was quite convoluted. These high-flown paragraphs were most likely the work of the department of Administrative Organs, in charge of relations with the institutions of law enforcement. In fact, each of the *obkom* departments made contributions to the speeches of the First Secretary. Yeltsin's aides would then rewrite the fragments so as to give them a uniform style. Yeltsin himself always took a look at them and, before taking the podium, usually added his own ideas in spirited pen strokes. This so-called ideological activity generated floods of words, complex work "systems," and numerous reports, yet constituted a mechanism that turned a blind eye to reality.

Instructions of the day were to find the enemy and, accordingly, this was done. Yeltsin found the enemy in the person of Valerian Morozov, a man who tried to send abroad his bulky Marxist revisionist book. Morozov was a dangerous fellow who had tried to meet personally with the well-known anti-Soviet Andrei Sakharov and had even traveled to Gorkii (today Nizhnii Novgorod) to see the dissident scientist living in exile in that city on the banks of the Volga. Morozov died at a clinic of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1989. By that time, however, the communist elite of Sverdlovsk had already forgotten this victim of Soviet psychiatry, whose only sin had been a wish to perfect Marxism.

At the height of Andropov's brief rule, Yeltsin perceived an ideological threat among citizens who had succumbed to "the poisoned ideas of bourgeois nationalism." These citizens were being transformed into "spokesmen of the enemy," forgetting that the USSR was their country and that they had been educated by Soviet society. Among such citizens were two workers from a local factory who were charged with anti-Soviet agitation in 1982. "Blinded by Zionist propaganda," these enemies of the Soviet system made an 18-kilometer-long magnetic tape recording of hostile commentary by foreign broadcasters in an attempt to organize a discussion group for Zionist study and propaganda. Did the select group of Party officials in the auditorium know how many

65. TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 106, *delo* 22, *list* 18.

66. TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 106, *delo* 8, *list* 11.

sentences fit on 18 kilometers of magnetic tape?

Yeltsin also condemned the aspiration of Soviet citizens of Jewish origin to emigrate, an aspiration that, according to him, was equally pronounced among citizens of German origin: "With deceit and false promises, specially created ideological centers—so-called 'fraternal associations'—are attracting German Soviets to the supposed promised land."[67] "The enemies of socialism are not giving up the hope of reaching their goals through ideological aggression," said Yeltsin, who contended these enemies were using such western radio stations as the BBC for this purpose. Fortunately for the ideological hygiene of the *oblast'*, "customs" confiscated a letter sent to the BBC by a local journalism student and thus prevented the dissemination of harmful ideas. The ideological enemy could even be found in barbershops and beauty parlors. Yeltsin urged Party committees to pay special attention to these and other small enterprises such as small offices, stores, and dining halls, as "it is precisely there where immature judgments are frequently made and all types of rumors begin to spread."[68]

Andropov's orthodox ideological campaign tightened the filters that separated the province from the rest of the world and reactivated Soviet patriotism. The *obkom* cultural department banned three foreign movies in 1982, four in 1983, and increased the proportion of Soviet films in movie programming. Boris Yeltsin publicly confirmed the right of the *obkom* to ban films that demonstrated a "lack of ideological principle." At the end of 1982, the First Secretary emphasized that

> [t]he *oblast'* Party committee intends to become more rigorous in its selection of foreign films shown on the territory of Sverdlovsk *oblast'*. All of this banditry, murder, and drunkenness have a bad influence on our youth. . . . We have the right to cancel a showing—the right of a Party organ.[69]

Coinciding with the death of Andropov, the CPSU Central Committee even required an increase in the production of consumer goods with patriotic symbols.[70] Sverdlovsk obeyed, and Yeltsin was able to report that in 1984, industry in the province had created eight goods (tights or teakettles, he didn't specify) with patriotic symbols and that twenty-five more were planned for the following year. Eight of the symbols commemorated the fortieth anniversary of Soviet victory in WWII.[71]

Dialogues with the First Secretary

In the midst of Leonid Brezhnev's decline, some of the less lethargic Communist leaders made

67. Ibid., 14. A significant ethnic German colony had lived in Sverdlovsk province since the 1940s, consisting primarily of people who had been deported from the Republic of the Volga. Stalin dissolved the republic after the Nazi attack on the USSR.

68. Ibid., 15.

69. TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 107, *delo* 86.

70. Resolution of the Secretariat of the CPSU Central Committee, 8 February 1984. Iurii Andropov died on 9 February 1984.

71. TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 107, *delo* 94, *listy* 151–3.

timid attempts to take the pulse of their compatriots. Boris Yeltsin in Sverdlovsk and Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia were two such leaders. Yeltsin began to meet systematically with different social groups. With tea cup in hand, the First Secretary of the Sverdlovsk *obkom* knew how to make jokes with stern milkmaids who led a rough life and were poorly paid. He could also spend more than five hours at a time with students, as he did in May 1981 when he gave a speech before an auditorium of 1,700 people. ("The essence of these meetings wasn't the meetings themselves. A great deal of preliminary work was done beforehand," emphasized Viktor Iliushin, whose first important assignment on the Yeltsin team had been to organize the latter's meeting with students.[72])

The *obkom* reported the always hopeful and constructive results of such meetings to the Central Committee in Moscow. The students, a cross section from sixteen institutions of higher education, had been given "open, documented, and convincing information" and expressed their "ardent approval" and "total support of the foreign and domestic policies of the Communist Party, the Soviet state, and the decisions of the XXVI Congress of the CPSU." Out of a total of 1,074 notes received from the students, only 12 expressed negative opinions about the country's situation.[73]

Yeltsin's stellar moment in the art of communication, however, came on 18 December 1982, when he appeared on television to answer questions from his fellow citizens. Modern technology was put at the service of the residents of Sverdlovsk and the presence of Yeltsin in front of the television cameras served as an excuse for a broad mobilization. First, questions were gathered, next, answers were prepared, and finally, the promises made by Yeltsin were followed up.

The question-and-answer program was announced in October, before Leonid Brezhnev's death in early November. Yeltsin received 906 letters, some of which were between twenty and thirty pages long. The entire *obkom* apparatus sat down to work on the two thousand questions that had been gathered, questions that represented a survey of society's concerns.[74] The apparatus did a thorough job on the television dialogue. Once synthesized, the questions were arranged in forty categories with Yeltsin's answer next to each one, together with an indication of the *obkom* section in charge of keeping his promises.

Even though it wasn't exactly a direct dialogue, which would have been too much to expect in those days, Yeltsin's appearance before the public became the symbol of a new era. Iurii Andropov had just come to power and his idea of moral and ideological renewal was reflected in Yeltsin's initiative. On screen, the First Secretary addressed many of his fellow citizens by first and last name and managed to answer their banal questions. In some instances, the answers were a masterful display of his imaginative powers, in others, a timid foreshadowing of future political changes or a veiled reproach of the center for the problems of Sverdlovsk. Yeltsin, for

72. Viktor Iliushin in conversation with the author, Moscow, 16 November 1992.

73. TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 100, *delo* 115, 94–7.

74. TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 101, *delo* 86.

example, cleverly brushed off responsibility for the slow construction of a metro line intended to connect downtown Sverdlovsk with the Uralmash factory. The pace of the job, he said, was dependent on the resources provided by the government and the State Planning Committee (Gosplan).

Yeltsin knew how to transform himself into the ally of his fellow citizens when a problem stemmed from outside factors. Supply priorities thus accounted for the lack of cotton fabric and bedclothes in the province. Social organizations, which received 23 million meters of cloth, were at the top of the list; then came industry, supplied with 20 million meters; the general public came only at the bottom of the list, for whom a mere 4 million meters remained. Yeltsin claimed the problem could not be solved in the short term and recommended that workers in stores put pressure on the central organs to obtain more goods for the province.

Yeltsin also assured his fellow citizens that the general scarcity of goods had diminished. "It would be difficult for you to tell me it hasn't," he affirmed with all the *sangfroid* in the world. According to the First Secretary, there were now more refrigerators, vacuums, washing machines, color televisions, furniture, bath soap, detergent, tooth brushes, tooth paste, feminine toiletries, and lipstick on the market.

Two ceramic factories in the province produced tea services, but there were no teapots in the stores. The First Secretary explained to his television viewers that the tea pot was the first thing to break in the set and that once broken, it was impossible to buy a replacement because it wasn't profitable for enterprises to produce teapots by themselves. They were three times as hard to make than the saucers and cost exactly the same. Yeltsin, who had looked into the problem, promised the production of 700,000 teapots in 1983 and 1 million in 1985. "I believe a million teapots a year will be enough to satisfy demand," he remarked. There was also a shortage of scissors. Yeltsin said that he had already secured a verbal commitment from a machinery construction factory for 50,000 pairs of scissors by 1983.

The problem of housing, however, was more serious. Television viewers asked Yeltsin for apartments but, as he noted, he wasn't a "magician." Even though he had the power to distribute apartments, he could not break Soviet laws because he was a communist, a First Secretary, and no matter how much he wanted to help someone, waiting lists had to be respected. Citizen Zhdanova, for example, had no reason to complain about discrimination. Comrade Zhdanov, her husband, was a lumberjack who had been passed over on the waiting list for housing at his enterprise as a punishment for having broken work discipline. Yeltsin felt sorry for his fellow citizen Zhdanova, but approved of the lumberjack's punishment and recommended that he do a better job.

In another case, the First Secretary took the side of the kindergarten principal of the Precision Mechanics Factory (*zavod Tochnoi Mekhaniki*) who, despite her place at the top of the waiting list for three years, had not received an apartment because her enterprise gave preference to people who worked directly on the production line. With apparent sincerity, Yeltsin was capable of recognizing abuses of power on the part of leaders and even gave statistics (although never sufficiently specific) on the campaign against corruption, the abuse of official cars,

and the illegal construction of country houses.[75]

Even a meeting with social science professors could turn into a detailed discourse on the hardships teachers endured in order to prepare their classes and tend to students in tiny apartments, or on the scarcity of ballpoint pens.[76] Professors, however, were not only concerned about men's underwear or pens; their questions on the political system foreshadowed the debate that would follow during the first years of *perestroika*. These people, charged with passing on the ideological legacy of the regime, were clearly dissatisfied with the status quo during the last months of Brezhnev's life. They wanted to know why the Twenty-Sixth Congress of the CPSU had flattered Leonid Brezhnev; why Yeltsin had not reacted to the inordinate praise of Krasnodar Party leader Sergei Medunov; why the head of Uzbekistan, Sharaf Rashidov, had been decorated, despite the fact that his republic had not fulfilled its cotton production goals. Could such prizes really be valued as a stimulus for work and productivity? (Medunov and Rashidov were among Andropov's first victims when he came to power.)

The professors asked why there was no Communist Party of the Russian Federation and how it was possible that the Twenty-Sixth Congress of the CPSU had not debated the wisdom of giving one single person the positions of both Secretary General of the CPSU Central Committee and Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Together with such common euphemisms of the times as "constant disproportion," the professors openly used the word "inflation." They also wanted to know "to what extent inertia had taken over the CPSU" and suggested that perhaps the time had come to develop forms of internal democracy.[77] At the time, First Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers Geidar Aliev appeared to be the standard-bearer of the fight against corruption; one of the questions posed to Yeltsin concerned the extent to which he thought Sverdlovsk suffered from the same faults of which Aliev had spoken—bribery, corruption, protectionism, and abuse of power.[78]

Premonitions of the Future

The very manner in which issues were discussed on the eve of the death of Andropov in 1984 demonstrated the contradictions of the Soviet system. Yeltsin wanted to avoid mobilizations of workers to the countryside, but if he renounced such mobilizations, the crops would go unharvested. He had given his assurance that the CPSU did not want to interfere in the job of the soviets, but by order of the Central Committee the *obkom* created a department of the economy and a department of agriculture, which only worsened its meddling in economic affairs. Yeltsin demanded that the *obkom* use "convincing arguments" and delve deeply into

75. "Vstrecha s pervym sekretarëm," Sverdlovsk local television broadcast, 18 December 1982.

76. Questions submitted to Boris Yeltsin at a meeting with chairmen and teachers of social science departments in Sverdlovsk *oblast'*, TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 101, *delo* 87, *listy* 7–21.

77. Ibid., *listy* 11–14.

78. Boris Yeltsin, *Central Urals: The Borders of Creation* (Sverdlovsk: Uralskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1981.)

the analysis of reality. At the same time, however, he criticized the local newspaper *Vechernii Sverdlovsk* for "trying to attract readers. . . . We do not have such a need. The editorial staff and the Party committee are forgetting that it is a Party organ," he said.[79]

As First Secretary of Sverdlovsk *oblast'*, Boris Yeltsin repeatedly defended the interests of the periphery *vis-à-vis* the center, even using Moscow newspapers for this purpose. In 1980, Yeltsin accused the State Planning Committees of both the USSR and the Russian Republic of having contributed to the deterioration of living conditions in the city of Sverdlovsk by permitting industry to develop without the necessary infrastructure. "The general managers of the large enterprises bear no small portion of the blame for this situation," said Yeltsin. "For them, the needs of the city are often of no consequence," he affirmed, fearing that a new wave of immigration would result from plans to expand the gigantic enterprises of Sverdlovsk. "Is this really necessary?" he wondered.[80] Yeltsin also criticized the lack of coordination between central and local plans as well as the ambitious construction projects of central ministries.[81] During his tenure as *obkom* leader, he managed to involve the gigantic factories located in Sverdlovsk in a program to produce consumer goods. The small portable washing machines from the Uralmash factory were a result of this victory, but the local supply situation still failed to improve substantially.

The struggle between the center and the periphery acquired such an overall character in Soviet society that even the Party apparatus became subject to it. According to Mikhail Rutkevich, founder of the philosophy faculty of the Urals State University, provincial Party workers felt themselves to be second-class citizens with respect to their Moscow counterparts and harbored anti-Moscow sentiment. In Rutkevich's opinion, the contradiction between the center and the periphery in Soviet times was subsequently transformed into a contradiction between Russia and the USSR.[82] Beginning with the *oblast'* and the defense of the periphery, Yeltsin would discover Russia and, using it as a banner, launch his conquest of the Soviet center.

CONCLUSION

More than a year after Central Committee secretary Egor Ligachëv made a reconnaissance expedition to Sverdlovsk to meet him, Yeltsin was transferred to Moscow in April 1986.[83] He did not leave for a high-ranking position—he became head of the construction department of the Central Committee, where he remained for several months before being appointed leader of the Moscow city Party organization.

79. Speech of Boris Yeltsin to Twenty-Third Sverdlovsk *Oblast'* Party Conference, "Protokol XIII oblastnoi partiinoi konferentsii."

80. Boris Yeltsin, "Chem silen rukovoditel'," *Uralskii rabochii*, 28 October 1980; reprinted from *Pravda*, 26 October 1980.

81. Boris Yeltsin, "Videt' i predvidet'," *Uralskii rabochii*, 14 August 1981; reprinted from *Pravda*, 13 August 1981.

82. Mikhail Rutkevich in conversation with the author, Moscow, 16 November 1992.

83. Yeltsin's transfer was ratified by the seventh plenum of the Sverdlovsk *obkom* of the CPSU on 19 April 1985. TsDOOSO, *fond* 4, *opis'* 111, *delo* 4.

Splintering the pencil he held in his hand, Yeltsin bid farewell to the workers of the Party apparatus of the *obkom*. His old acquaintance Iurii Petrov, who had become First Secretary of the Nizhnii Tagil *gorkom* and later a secretary of the Sverdlovsk *obkom*, returned from a stay in Moscow (where he had been working in the Central Committee's Department of Organizational Party Work since 1982) to take over for him. Petrov arrived in the province with a message from Gorbachev: "acceleration" (*uskorenie*). Such was the slogan of the day.

The official who left for Moscow in April 1985 was a convinced, although undogmatic communist. True, he had occasionally lauded Brezhnev, although perhaps less profusely than others because he wasn't a person given to habitual praise. Being the same type of "man of action" as Gennadii Bogomiakov, leader of neighboring Tiumen' *oblast'*, only Yeltsin knew in his heart of hearts how strong was his faith in the system he represented and the ability of that system to change for the better. Together with people like Egor Ligachëv and Nikolai Ryzhkov, Boris Yeltsin was part of the "A" team of *perestroika* carefully selected by Mikhail Gorbachev during the ephemeral term of Konstantin Chernenko. All these men were united by a desire for change and the conviction that it was possible to achieve without altering the basis of the system they knew so well, forged as they had been in the melting pot of the Party itself—that is, in the hierarchical structure of Communist Party committees that constituted the pyramid of power in the USSR.

Yeltsin was an outsider from the provinces who arrived in Moscow the usual way, by climbing the ladder of political promotion in the Soviet system. The difference with Yeltsin, however, was that he never fully integrated into the Moscow milieu. It was precisely in this failure to adjust, in the preservation of his provincial character, that lay the strength of this man who, in 1987, would trigger the first major crisis of Mikhail Gorbachev's pro-reform team. Between 1988 and 1991, Yeltsin would use Sverdlovsk in particular (and the Russian provinces in general) as a springboard for taking the Kremlin and conquering Russia.

In 1991 Yeltsin moved into the Kremlin and handed out important positions to people from the Urals. Having reached the upper echelon of the state hierarchy through personal ties to the president, these natives of Sverdlovsk became a very important part of post-communist Russia, making decisions about its destiny, diamonds, secrets, the flow of information to the president, and the extent to which Russians would have access to their own history.

The Boris Yeltsin who now controls Russia's destiny is a different man from the CPSU *obkom* secretary who controlled the destiny of Sverdlovsk *oblast'*. Yeltsin has undergone a profound personal evolution: he quit the CPSU in 1990, defended democratic values during the attempted coup d'état in August 1991, committed himself to radical economic reform later that fall, and brought about the demise of the USSR in a conspiratorial rendezvous in the Belorussian forest in December 1991. Despite his transformation, the system of relationships that prevailed during the communist era has left its mark on the Russian president: many of his personality traits, work habits, and ways of relating to subordinates and colleagues were formed long ago in the heart of the Urals. Traces of the old system remain alive and well among a political elite that, for the most part, comes from the provinces of Russia and whose members act

intuitively out of a desire for change without having completely overcome their background and schooling in a totalitarian system.

Upon coming to power, the rebels on the periphery who had opposed the center lost touch with their fellow citizens. They soon integrated into and adapted themselves to old forms of power, benefiting from the same system of privileges that had characterized the Soviet elite. The best-kept secret of the Kremlin corridors is not the deviousness or perfidiousness of its occupants, but rather the extreme simplicity of the relationships between those who walk these corridors. As in a medieval world, power in post-communist Russia is measured by one's proximity to the leader—one's ability to influence his decisions and steer his hand toward one decree or another. Little by little, a stifling symbiosis began to emerge. The Kremlin assumed the coordinates of a province and the locals ensconced there assimilated into the system of the Soviet Kremlin without losing their provincial idiosyncracies. As a result, the political life of the Russian state stagnated, a development attributable to an obsolete model of personalized management and an inability to create a sophisticated political framework for the processes gestating within Russian society.