

democratically on its exercise. The process would be facilitated by the organization of Round Tables and by popular rallies such as the large public demonstration in Moscow marking the eve of the February Plenum. Thus, outmanoeuvring the conservative opposition and enabling Gorbachev's centrist position to absorb his radical critics, the objective would be a broad coalition of political groupings, parties and representatives from all social strata. The rapport Gorbachev has established with the workers, especially the miners in the handling of their grievances last year, would be an important asset. But the strategy stresses particularly the avoidance of the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, explicitly recognizes the predominant position of the "middle strata" now in Soviet society and of the importance of close links with those strata and with the intelligentsia. This approach is specifically contrasted with the tendency of the existing Party apparatus, jealous of its privileges, to form close ties with right-wing nationalist and chauvinist forces.

Gorbachev seriously intends that the Soviet Communist party should play the leading and unifying role in Soviet society, but he is adamant in affirming that the Party should renounce all political and legal advantages, and must gain its leading position by strictly defending its programme and by cooperating with all other social and political forces. Clearly the drastic reforms that will move the Party in this radically changed direction, even if their approval may be taken for granted at the forthcoming Party Congress, will take some time to accomplish. In the meantime the Party, in its present state, seems poorly equipped to contribute to the development of a more advanced political culture, or to cope with the centrifugal tendencies stimulated by the expanding scope of *perestroika*, *glasnost* and democratization. The Party is, indeed, more likely over the next year or so, to see itself split, as in the case of the Lithuanian Party, into two and possibly three factions. Against the background of the externally imposed and despised regimes of the discarded East European Communist Parties, Gorbachev seems to be counting, perhaps much too optimistically, on the indigenous strength of Soviet Party structures throughout most of the USSR and on a relatively slow development of competing pluralist structures to give him the necessary time to develop the new Party model.