

continuing strength among many nationalities of their distinctive cultural and religious traditions. These processes of change and the networks of active, informal community and professional groups they have generated, clearly underpin Gorbachev's drive for reform, but they also greatly complicate its implementation. Once the political crust of Party and state power was lifted there would be little to prevent an explosion of long-suppressed grievances.

In the light of the critical state of the economy, Gorbachev, without denying the importance of social reform, made it clear on assuming office in 1985 that in order to bring about better living conditions it was imperative to change the system of centralized "administrative-command". To overcome the bureaucratic obstacles to such change he began to promote popular participation in the life of the country through greater freedom of expression and wider political choice. But, in extending the notion of democratization beyond the economic sphere, he also stimulated a shift of emphasis to socio-political reform. The swiftly advancing course of technological and economic modernization in Western countries had convinced him that the achievement of a similarly high level of modernization in the Soviet Union could not be separated from the development of a political culture capable, as was the case in the West, of ensuring popular participation in the political process. Thus, for Gorbachev, change and restructuring in the USSR now embrace many dimensions: the economy, the political system, the constitutional structure, the legal system, the military and inter-ethnic relationships in a vast multinational state. While his reforming objectives give him an extremely overloaded agenda fraught with much uncertainty as to their feasibility, and to his own survival, the changes he has introduced so far are remarkable and substantial enough to exclude their being reversed by legal, democratic means.

1. The Economy

The Agenda of Economic Recovery and Restructuring

In an initial policy statement (*Pravda*, 29 April 1985) Gorbachev declared that the development of society would be shaped, to a decisive extent, by qualitative changes in the economy, including a determined effort to shift to intensive growth and a drastic