

Committee and government, in the ministries, republics, and regions . . . in laboring collectives and in the youth league." Gorbachev allowed in the same speech that not all opposition was selfish and narrow-minded, which is how he tended to dismiss it in earlier pronouncements, conceding now that some of the reservations were motivated by a "concern for the stability of our society."

There is no scientific way to measure the extent or depth of the opposition to Gorbachev or to estimate the odds of whether, like Nikita Khrushchev in 1964, his reforms will be prematurely terminated by a conservative coup. We can surmise, nonetheless, that his ideas are least popular among older age groups, among those attached to orthodox Soviet ideology and behavioral norms, and among those who stand to lose materially from serious economic reform (and this includes many workers as well as administrators).

We can note that Gorbachev has shown himself to be a resourceful and tactically nimble politician, who so far has outwitted his opponents at every turn. We can reason also that roughly the next year is a period of maximum danger for him. His reforms, especially in the economy, are still in embryo and will not pay off for some time to come, whereas the special party conference, the first since 1941, that Gorbachev intends to convene in order to push political changes (and presumably to purge conservatives from the Soviet establishment) looms in 1988. If Gorbachev is to be stopped outright, the best and perhaps the only time for this to be done is in the months ahead.

FORTUNATELY, CERTAIN OF Gorbachev's own changes should help us follow the progress and predict the fate of his programme. The policy of *glasnost* (openness, publicity, candour) is being expanded almost by the week, with the main responsibility for its execution being borne by Aleksandr Yakovlev, the national party secretary for propaganda and cultural affairs and a former ambassador

to Canada. Many things remain beyond criticism; the communications media have a new bias (pro-Gorbachev), and some of the newly released information (for example, in statistical handbooks) is amateurishly prepared and inconsistent. Nevertheless, one can only wonder at how many institutions, policies, and habits can now be discussed with reasonable accuracy and honesty.

What is most encouraging for the Sovietologist is that Gorbachev and his team now accept the necessity of providing the Soviet public with a modicum of information pertinent to politics, and not merely on economic or technical questions. Only this way, in their view, can the Soviet Union's passive subjects become more active citizens who will participate, admittedly under controlled con-

ditions, in the making of some political decisions and whose higher morale and sense of responsibility will spill over into the economy. Thus Soviet officials, journalists, and social scientists have been starting in recent months to write and talk about how political decisions are and should be made, this with a degree of frankness unknown in the Soviet media since the 1920s.

Gorbachev himself has said that the party Central Committee, a supposedly all-powerful body, has for years been inert and uninterested in discussing policy issues. Biting critiques have been published of the local soviets, the municipal councils that have sweeping rights on paper but in reality are largely subservient to their executives. Local party secretaries have given interviews in which they refer gingerly to power relations within secretive party bureaus. Journalists and historians have been looking again at Stalin's style of rule and a decision has now apparently been made to revise the party history textbooks of the Brezhnev period and, in fact, to probe more deeply into the early years of Soviet political history than was possible even under Khrushchev.

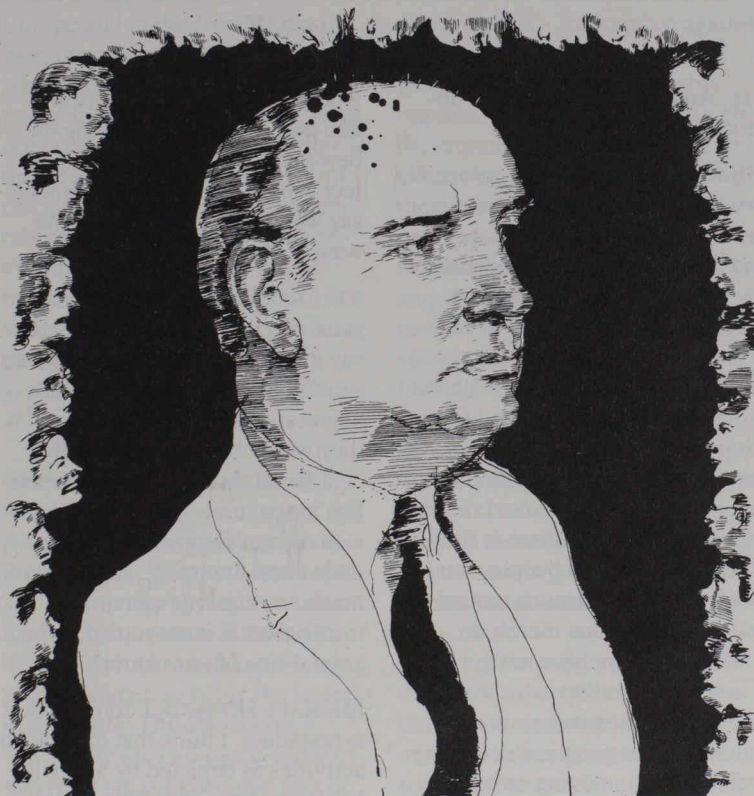
WE ARE LOOKING HERE ONLY AT beginnings, but they are exciting beginnings in a society in which politics has almost always been equated with control from above. In the area of information policy, at least, Western analysts should in a significant way benefit from changes aimed at the Soviet population and ultimately at making the Soviet system less neurotic, more modern, and more competitive. If Gorbachev has his way, neither Soviet political life nor Western views of it will ever be quite the same again. □

Further Reading

Seweryn Bialer. *The Soviet Paradox: External Expansion, Internal Decline*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986.

Timothy J. Colton. *The Dilemma of Reform in the Soviet Union*, revised edition, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1986.

Martin Walker. *The Waking Giant*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1987.



THE WORDS OF GORBACHEV

Editor's Note: *The following are excerpts from a marathon-length speech delivered by Mikhail Gorbachev to the Communist Party Central Committee in Moscow in January 1987. The question is: how are they to be read? As serious proposals or clever puffery? How, indeed, do we take the measure of Gorbachev and the USSR today?*

Economic Reforms

. . . the income of an enterprise, all forms of incentives for the members of labour collectives and the scale of satisfaction of social requirements will depend wholly on the final results of work, on the quantity and quality of output produced and services rendered.

Overcoming Resistance to Reforms

. . . Apparently it is difficult for some comrades to understand that democracy is not just a slogan but the essence of restructuring. They must change their views and habits, if they are not to be left outside the mainstream of life. This is our insistent advice to all doubters and laggards.

'Openness' and Democracy

The democratization of society poses in a new way the question of control over how Party, Soviet and economic agencies and their personnel work. As far as control 'from above' is concerned, here, as you know, appreciable changes have taken place recently. Various 'forbidden zones' for criticism and control are receding into the past.