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The Irresistible Fall of Mikhail Gorbachev

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Date de mise en ligne : lundi 13 novembre 2023

Date de parution : 1er février 1992

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International Viewpoint, #221, February 3, 1992, pp. 26 - 27

The attempt at reforming the bureaucratic Soviet regime undertaken by Mikhail Gorbachev was doomed to failure. This confirms the impossibility of an attempt at self-reform by the bureaucracy.

Gorbachev's failure is in line with that of Tito, Khrushchev, Mao or Dubcek. The Soviet bureaucracy is too vast, its social networks too strong, the web of inertia, routine, obstruction and sabotage on which it rests too dense for it to be decisively weakened by actions from above. Its removal demands the initiative and action of tens of millions of workers, that is, a real popular revolution from below, an anti-bureaucratic political revolution. Gorbachev was incapable of unleashing such a revolution nor did he wish to. His aim was to preserve the system while profoundly reforming it.

Gorbachev's course towards a radical reform of the system was not, in the first place, the result of any ideological choice. It was the outcome of unavoidable objective conditions, of the ever deepening crisis of the system in which the USSR was mired since the end of the 1970s ;

The main signs of this crisis were :

- * The continuous fall in growth rates, which remained lower than those of the USA for more than a decade ;
- * The impossibility in these conditions of maintaining at one and the same time the drive for the modernization of the economy, the arms race with imperialism, a constant, if modest rise in the living standards of the masses and the maintenance and expansion of the privileges of the bureaucracy. At least two if not three of these objectives had to be abandoned.
- * The failure, predicted by Trotsky in the 1920s, of the conversion of extensive into intensive industrialization. This conversion demanded giving priority to problems of quality rather than quantity, exact calculations of costs, transparency of economic mechanisms and the growing sovereignty of the consumers. All of which are incompatible with bureaucratic dictatorship ;
- * The beginning of a pronounced social regression, expressed particularly by the existence of 60 million poor and the marked deterioration of the health system (including for several years an absolute fall in life expectancy) ;
- * The loss of any political legitimacy by the regime, with the appearance of broad sectors of opposition, (experts, writers, young people, the oppressed nationalities, and workers acting to some extent independently) ;
- * A very deep ideological and moral crisis that the bureaucracy could no longer control.

Gorbachev's defeat is above all the defeat of economic perestroika. Badly conceived from the beginning, changing direction several times, combining increasingly contradictory objectives, perestroika ended up dismantling the old command economy without replacing it with anything coherent.

From stagnation to economic decline

The Irresistible Fall of Mikhail Gorbachev

After several somersaults, economic decline followed stagnation from 1990 onwards. Galloping inflation contributed to precipitating the decline. The links between enterprises began to unravel. Consumer goods disappeared from the official distribution circuits, being gradually monopolized by various mafias and the free market, where they were sold at exorbitant prices.

The essential minimal income in Moscow at the start of 1991 was 200 rubles a month per person, which was still covered by the minimum wage. In October 1991 the essential minimum income had risen to 521 rubles according to calculations by the unions. Some 90% of Muscovites got less than this sum. Since then the situation has got still worse. And now we have the massive price rises of January 2, 1992. Given this progressive deterioration of the living conditions of broad masses, Gorbachev completely lost his popular base.

The fundamental driving force behind Gorbachev's foreign policy was from imperialism to save the sinking ship. This led to counter-revolutionary regional accords at the expense of the Central American and Cuban revolutions, and the liberation struggles in South Africa and the Arab world. In this, Gorbachev was doing nothing more than continuing the long history of betrayals of the international revolution by Stalin, his successors and their acolytes : the betrayal of the Spanish, Yugoslav and Greek revolutions, the betrayal of the opportunities for revolutionary breakthroughs in France and Italy in 1944-48 and 1968-9, and the betrayals of the Chinese, Vietnamese, Cuban (in the first phase) and Portuguese revolutions.

However, if it was illusory to expect Gorbachev to succeed, it would also be an error to close one's eyes to the profound and positive changes that took place in the USSR under Gorbachev.

These changes are essentially summed up by glasnost, or, if you prefer, the substantial extension of democratic liberties in practice enjoyed by the Soviet masses.

These liberties are of course limited, partial and not constitutionally guaranteed and have been combined with authoritarian features that were accentuated in the last period of Gorbachev's reign. But these democratic liberties were real enough. Many parties, political associations, social groupings, and independent workers' organizations arose. A press entirely outside the control of the party's censorship appeared. Public demonstrations, often of great size, took place. There were an increasing number of strikes. Elections offering the voters a choice of candidates with genuinely different political orientations were organized.

To deny that this was a colossal change for the masses compared to the Stalinist and post-Stalinist regimes, and to describe the Gorbachev regime as "totalitarian", amounts to prettifying the Stalinist dictatorship.

Under Stalin there were millions of political prisoners. Under Gorbachev there were less than in the USA, Britain, the Spanish State or Israel. Under Stalin all strikes were bloodily suppressed. Under Gorbachev no strike was bloodily suppressed.

Such a mistaken vision of the political reality in the USSR is the result of an ultra-leftist conception of variants of political regimes. In this conception only one distinction exists : the power of the Soviets and the fascist " or fascist-inclined " bourgeois dictatorship. All intermediary forms disappear from view.

The August 1991 putschists wanted to severely limit or even suppress the democratic liberties that existed in reality. They intended to suppress the right to strike and independent workers organizations. This is why the putsch had to be opposed by all means available. And this is why the failure of the putsch should be hailed.

This means the working masses of the ex-USSR must now undertake a struggle on two fronts : for the defense, extension and consolidation of democratic liberties on the one hand, and on the other against privatization. To abandon one of these two central struggles would be to sacrifice the fundamental interests of the working class.

There is no chance of the development and victory of the political revolution in the ex-USSR without the working class regaining its capacity for mass independent political class organization. This objective, in turn, can only be realized by a long period of apprenticeship, of the development of struggles and the emergence of a new vanguard. Without democratic liberties in reality, this process will be much longer, more difficult and would have fewer chances of reaching a successful conclusion. And without such a political revolution, the restoration of capitalism is inevitable in the long term.

Gorbachev was not overthrown by a mass mobilization. Nor was he overthrown by an offensive by imperialism or domestic bourgeois forces. He has been overthrown by a wing of the bureaucracy led by Boris Yeltsin.

Yeltsin : a man of the apparatus

Yeltsin, just as much, if not more than Gorbachev, represents a faction in the top levels of the nomenklatura. Yeltsin, by his whole past and education, is a man of the apparatus. His gifts as a populist demagogue do not permit the modification of this judgement. If there is something that distinguished Yeltsin from Gorbachev it is that he is less inclined to evasion, more authoritarian and thus more dangerous for the masses.

People will say that, unlike Gorbachev, who continued in some vague fashion to call himself a socialist, Yeltsin has come out openly for the restoration of capitalism. This is true. But professions of faith are not enough for us to form an assessment of politicians. We have to look at what happens in practice and what social interests they serve.

From this point of view, Yeltsin and his allies in the liquidation of the USSR in favour of the "Commonwealth of Sovereign States" represent a faction of the nomenklatura distinct from the bourgeois forces properly so-called (essentially the "lumpen-millionaires", the new bourgeoisie), although they can overlap at the margins.

The most typical cases are those of the presidents of the Ukraine and Kazakhstan who, together with Yeltsin, have "betrayed Gorbachev" (in the latter's own phrase) to liquidate the USSR.

Both were leaders of the Stalinist apparatus in these two republics at the beginning of the Gorbachev era. Both continue to rely on the local, hardly changed, KGB. At the start both played a waiting game, or even supported the putsch. They have both used the legitimate revolt of the masses of their region against national oppression to convert themselves into "nationalist leaders".

Their cynicism is manifested by their readiness to associate, at least for the time being, with Yeltsin and his acolytes, who are authentic Great Russian chauvinists.

What we are seeing in the ex-USSR is a triangular struggle between : factions at the top of the nomenklatura ; directly restorationist, that is, bourgeois forces in the social sense of the term ; and the labouring masses. These three forces are distinct, acting in society according to their own distinct interests.

New putsches are possible. Yeltsin may well rapidly lose popularity, given the anti-worker and anti-popular policies

he is pursuing. Behind him can be seen the sinister figure of Vladimir Shirinovsky, the Soviet LePen, who looks for inspiration at one and the same time to Stalin, the Tsar, and Pinochet ; he has the support of a wing of the army and is furiously Great Russian, xenophobic, anti-semitic and racist. His popularity should not be underestimated.

We do not today face either a revolutionary or a pre-revolutionary situation in the ex-USSR. Without doubt, the working class is infinitely stronger than its adversaries, far stronger than in 1917 or 1927. At the same time Stalinism is, as we have always predicted, in the process of collapsing. But for it to be overthrown by a political revolution, the working class must act as an independent political force, which is not the case today.

Due to the enormous discredit thrown on the very ideas of communism, socialism or Marxism by the Stalinist dictatorship, the void created by the profound ideological/moral crisis of Soviet society is not about to be filled by the working class. This is active, but only for a short-term immediate ends and in a fragmented and discontinuous way. The right wing has the political initiative.

The broken thread of history

Contrary to our legitimate hopes up until 1980-81 (the first rise of Solidarnosc), the thread that leads from the revolt in the Vorkuta labour camp and the East German uprising of 1953 through the Hungarian revolution of 1956 to the "Prague Spring" and the first steps of Polish Solidarnosc has been broken. It will take time to restore it.

Does this mean that a lasting restoration of the power of the nomenklatura or a real restoration of capitalism are the most likely outcomes ? Not at all. They are just as unlikely as a rapid move to political revolution.

Certainly, the Yeltsin government has taken some initial steps towards capitalist restoration. But there is a huge distance between the beginning and the end of such a process.

For a real restoration of capitalism, an extension of the commodity economy "which remains today less developed in the ex-USSR than in the time of the New Economic Policy of the 1920s" is not enough. The big means of production and exchange must also become commodities. This requires at least \$1,000bn, a sum which is not available in present conditions, either in the West or the ex-USSR itself.

It is also necessary for labour power to be subjected to the laws of the "labour market". This implies 30 to 40 million unemployed and a drop in living standards of the order of 30 to 50% ; this will meet with fierce resistance.

The most probable eventuality is a long period of decomposition and chaos. Our modest but real hope must be that in this period the Soviet working class will be able gradually to reconquer its class independence. The main task of the small and fragmented socialist forces is to link up with the workers and aid them to overcome the obstacles to that end.[didim escort](#), [marmaris escort](#), [didim escort bayan](#), [marmaris escort bayan](#), [didim escort bayanlar](#), [marmaris escort bayanlar](#)