

The Gorbachev Revolution

Innovation has replaced inertia. Secrecy has given way to a new openness. The crisis in Soviet society looks at long last as if it is out in the open and being confronted. But how far will this democratisation process go? In this interview by Monty Johnstone (below), **Fedor Burlatsky**, a close aide to Gorbachev and political commentator on *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, the highly influential Soviet weekly, suggests it might be a long way



What political significance do you attach to the permission given to Sakharov to return to Moscow from internal exile in Gorky?

I regard it as an indication of the new stage we have reached in the process of democratisation.

Does this reflect a change in the Soviet government's attitude to 'dissidents'?

The position of Sakharov is not the same as that of dissidents generally. Sakharov has performed valuable services for the Soviet Union in the past as a scientist.

But some other 'dissidents' have already been released. Will this be extended to all those imprisoned or exiled for their political activities?

It depends on them. They will be given a chance to define their attitude to the democratic changes now taking place in our country and some will come back to play their part in society, I think.

Would you like to say more about these changes in your political system underway since April 1985 under Gorbachev's leadership?

We have come increasingly to understand that the government's reforms can only go forward with deep changes in our political system. In recent

speeches, especially in Stavropol and Krasnodar, Gorbachev emphasised that democratisation is the precondition for real economic changes and development. What kind of democratisation can we speak of? This is a big and profound process of which we are only at the beginning. But there are already interesting changes in many spheres. First of all the problem which we call, in Russian, *glasnost*.

Openness, freedom and accessibility of information.

Yes, and this involves a new role for public opinion, influencing the policy-makers and the political process as a whole, and affecting all political decisions. It's not just a one-way process from top to bottom. It's also a question of collective farms, factories and co-operatives influencing the top leadership of our (Communist) party as well as the regional party organisations and Soviets.

Can you give examples of some of the things that are happening?

I would mention the big changes in the activities of our writers and film-makers, as well as in our mass media. Recently were published such novels as *Sad Detective* by Astafyev, *The Fire* by

Rasputin, and *The Execution Place* by Aitmatov. These are very interesting novels because they deal with problems like alcoholism, crime and drugs, which weren't dealt with before. Now there are big discussions about them with different views expressed. There's a lot of controversy around Aitmatov's novel, which discusses problems of morality and religion in an unusual way. Many people have criticised him, but he's responded, especially in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, and the debate continues.

There are also some very interesting developments in the cinema. About 10 films which had been held up by the authorities - in some cases for years - have now been released, and everyone can see them. I was particularly interested in the film *Repentance* made by the Georgian director Abuladze about the Beria period...

You call it the Beria period rather than the Stalin period?

It is especially about Beria, who was in charge of the security organs and who had led the party in Georgia; that's why I mention Beria. But this of course was during the Stalin period. It is concerned with Beria, his violence, and his arresting and ruining people. The film raises a very sharp problem, and shocked some bureaucrats.

Can you show where public opinion has changed political decisions?

Yes. The central committee of our party took a decision about diverting rivers in Siberia. The issue was taken up by many famous writers, especially Zalygin, Astafyev and Rasputin, both before and at the writers' congress last year. Now the decision has been revoked.

This suggests a significant change in the position and activity of organisations like the writers' union.

Yes. This new role being played by social institutions like the writers' and film makers' unions is another symptom of the process of democratisation. During last year's congress of film makers there was something like a mini-revolution. They changed all the leaders of their union. They elected Elem Klimov as their first secretary, the director of a famous film, maybe you know it - *Agony* - about Rasputin and our last Tsar, Nicholas II - which wasn't shown for eight years. Something similar occurred during the congress of writers when they elected a new first secretary, Vladimir Karpov, a very interesting man who fought in the second world war and was a Hero of the Soviet Union. At both congresses there were free elections and very interesting discussions with differing views, not only about art and culture, but also about social and especially ecological problems.

The economic reforms present another aspect of the democratisation process. We have begun to make big

economic changes, not to replace the socialist system, but rather structural reform - decentralisation, where there will be new possibilities for factories to have so-called self-management and self-financing. We have begun to democratise the economic sphere. We call it democracy at the economic level. This means, first of all, a real role for traditional organisations, such as the party organisations, the trade unions and the youth organisations, but maybe there will also be some new institutions.

Workers' councils?

I don't know exactly what it will be because a new statement is still being prepared about factories and co-operatives, and other economic institutions ...

A central committee statement?

It will be prepared as a special law, and I think there will be some new institutions. Everybody must have the feeling that they're an owner of the factory, and that their activity will be paid well with money, with goods, and with moral incentives.

How will this broadening of responsibility be reconciled with the role of the director and the system of one-man management?

There will be some new model. My own opinion is that we must find some model in which the strategy in the factory - concerning economic and social policy, conditions for the workers, their money - will be decided by the whole collective. But at the same time the executives, the administration - not one person, but a group administration, a group of directors - will have good possibilities for initiative, for decision-making in the everyday process.

But would these directors be appointed from above, by the ministries, as in the past, or chosen by the workers as in Yugoslavia, and in Czechoslovakia in 1968?

You know, it is a big problem because there are different views in our country, and the experiences in Yugoslavia, for example, or in Hungary or Czechoslovakia have been different. I spoke recently with representatives from Yugoslavia and they are not so satisfied. They have their own problems - the problem of bureaucracy, the problem of the differentiation between the more developed and less developed areas, and the problem of unemployment. Therefore we must be careful. We must research the experience of different countries, including Hungary, Yugoslavia, and now China - I wrote an article, maybe you know, about the economic reforms in China - and find our own direction. Therefore it is difficult to answer your question. Perhaps there will be new management bodies on which the workers will be represented, or maybe other institutional forms. We're discussing these problems at the moment.

And what about the question of the electoral system? I notice that in Gorbachev's report at the 27th congress he talked about the need for changes. How will this mean, for instance, the possibility of having more than one candidate?

This is a very interesting question. During my work on the magazine *Kommunist* from 1953-1960, I published many articles about the development of democracy. And I made the proposal at that time, 30 years ago, that we must do something of this kind - to have maybe a list of candidates, or two candidates for one place, maybe not in all regions, maybe not at all levels, but there must be more real possibilities for choice. But many specialists objected and mentioned technical problems. For example, who will agitate for one person, who for another person, and in what form - because they represent the same bloc, the 'bloc of communists and non-party people'. But I believe we will find a new way - especially at the local level. It is simple there because people know everybody, they know the candidates, they know not only their political platform, but their personal possibilities, their views, their activities, their morality. And then maybe we'll go from the local level to the republic level, and then maybe to the highest level, to the Supreme Soviet. I believe there will be big changes.

Do you see considerable resistance to this and the other changes from bureaucratic forces?

Yes, but we should be clear what the various sources of resistance to change actually are. The first is traditional thinking and conservative traditions. This is a psychological question for everybody - from the simple worker or peasant to government people and the secretary of the party. That's why Gorbachev said that 'restructuring' must first take place in our psychology. We must change ourselves - we must change our own methods. The leadership especially must understand that they will work more effectively in the new atmosphere, with openness, with the influence of public opinion, with democracy. Secondly, many people in the apparatus, especially in the state apparatus, are afraid because they will lose some power, and give new possibilities to the factories, to the co-operatives, to the regions.

And the final source of resistance is the problem of interest and privileges. Again, that too is a big problem for many people. You must understand that it is not only the apparatus, but also ordinary people who are not prepared for radical changes. We must not have illusions about the workers and peasants. There is an active part of them who want to work better, and get more money, more goods, and more appliances, and maybe their own homes, and dachas, but there are also many people who don't want to work harder. I believe that our hopes for the



A play by Fedor Burlatsky based on an imaginary conversation between two party secretaries was shown on Soviet tv in December and caused a sensation for its outspokenness

reforms and the process of democratisation are first of all based on the political will of our leadership, in the first instance Gorbachev, because only a very deep and strong political will can sustain such structural changes.

After Stalin's death this kind of process began to be carried through with Khrushchev at the 20th congress in 1956, and it continued at the 22nd congress in 1961. But then it came to an end with the removal of Khrushchev and his replacement by Brezhnev, and for a long period of time a certain reaction took place - not taking things back to the Stalin period, but nonetheless slowing down and in some respects reversing this process of democratisation. How do you account for this? And how will you make sure that the same thing doesn't happen again?

After the 20th congress there were very big changes. We changed our laws and court procedures. But the traditional thinking, the political culture of the population and possibly the interests of some social groups were such that it was impossible to carry through such deep reforms as now. I can say that there were objective reasons, and subjective reasons. First of all the objective reasons - the traditions and the conservative thinking in the apparatus and in the population. And the subjective reasons were the new leadership that took over after Khrushchev.

I don't want to mention the new leader's name, but you know who I mean. He was maybe a conservative leader, not a bad man, but a conservative leader, who didn't believe in change.

And as he became older he believed even less in change.

Yes. And when Andropov came to power, he began a new style, a new method of rule in the party and the whole society, and that is even more true with Gorbachev...

Some of us didn't understand why after Andropov, with whom things had begun to change, we should have had Chernenko, with whom things seemed to stop changing.

Yes. It's a lucky story how Gorbachev came to power. Maybe it is the best opportunity for the Soviet Union, for new thinking and for international policy.

But how to ensure that the same resistances don't lead after some years to a reversal also in the present reform process?

Yes. You know I personally am an optimist - a biological optimist - I have believed in reform for maybe 35 years. I have written in this way in all my works and my articles for a long time. And I believe that now we will not go back, because the problems are so urgent and so sharp. Public opinion understands the big scale of our problems, and now we have a new society, a more educated society, and we have new cadres, cultured cadres. It is not the same as after Stalin's time. And last but not least, the political will of our leadership. It is traditional in Russia, you know, that the reform must be supported first of all from our leadership. This is the case now.

You mentioned the debates and developments in the film makers' and writers' unions. Do you think that we shall see in the future similar debates in the Supreme Soviet, and at party congresses and so on, as opposed to the unanimity on the principal questions that we've seen so far? This process began at the last congress, the 27th congress. If you examine carefully the different speeches, you will see differences ...

But only differences of emphasis.

For example, Yeltsin and others were more progressive, more radical than

Kunaev for instance.

Yes, maybe it did not take place so openly, but we understood everything. You see this was the first step. And we will have the same in the Soviets. I believe that the sessions at the Soviets will be longer than now. Not two or three days as now, but enough time for a proper debate, for big discussions, for explanations, for different views and alternative proposals. And this process is beginning now at the regional level.

Gorbachev's New Broom

March 1985: Mikhail Gorbachev elected as general secretary of Soviet Communist Party.

April: Gorbachev in report to Communist central committee exposes 'unfavourable trends' in the economy.

From May: Campaigns develop against alcoholism and corruption. Important changes in government and Communist Party leadership.

Oct: Draft of more realistic Communist Party programme issued for nationwide discussion.

Jan/Feb 1986: Press features many critical contributions, including attacks on privilege in Communist Party, in the party's pre-congress discussion.

Feb/March: 27th congress of Soviet Communist Party meets. Unanimously adopts new party programme, rules and economic guidelines. New central committee elected with many new members. Gorbachev's report stresses need for 'radical reform' of economy.

April: Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

June: Government plan for diverting Siberian rivers attacked as ecologically unsound at Soviet writers' congress.

Aug: Government drops Siberian river diversion plan.

Summer and Autumn: Gorbachev, on visits to Soviet regions, makes increasingly hard-hitting speeches stressing need for 'democratisation'.

Nov: Supreme Soviet adopts law legalising limited private enterprise in service sector.

Dec: *Pravda* criticises Brezhnev's leadership (1964-82) for 'lack of consistent democracy and openness'. Dinmukhamed Kunaev, closely associated with Brezhnev, replaced as first secretary of Kazakhstan Communist Party by Gennady Kolbin, a Russian supporter of Gorbachev's reform policies. Subsequent rioting in Kazakh capital, Alma-Ata, reported in Soviet press. *Literaturnaya Gazeta* publishes a report of Supreme Court conference envisaging reform of legal system to protect citizens' rights. Widespread 'gross violations of the law' exposed. Academician Sakharov allowed unconditionally to return to Moscow from internal exile in Gorky. Some other 'dissidents' freed from prisons and labour camps.

Jan 1987: All Soviet industry goes over to new system of material incentives and self-financing.

But it will go further during the next period.

So you envisage that in the future there will be debates on the issues of public concern with different points of view being represented in the press, in the Supreme Soviet. ...?

Yes. In our press, radio and tv, very serious problems are now discussed, not only by professional journalists, but by writers, by scientists and by ordinary people in their letters with different proposals and criticisms. This is something new - a new role for public opinion. And the same, I believe, will happen at the sessions of the Soviets, of trade unions, of youth organisations and especially in the party.

What about on an issue such as nuclear energy after Chernobyl? Can you foresee a controversial debate taking place on the extent to which they should continue to develop nuclear power stations, with some people arguing, as over here, that nuclear power should be phased out?

You know this is a very painful question because Chernobyl concerned the fate of many people and therefore there is no open discussion about this tragedy. But as you know our central committee and government gave the public an explanation of this event and took a very firm decision to guarantee that it will not be repeated elsewhere. But at the informal level there are different views, especially among the scientists and the writers, and there are views something like those of the greens in Western countries. Some writers argue that we should not place nuclear power stations near towns or rivers but instead maybe in Siberia or in other places where it wouldn't be so dangerous. You can see this mentioned in some speeches and articles, especially by the writers. But, I repeat, Chernobyl is a very painful question. Therefore there are not such big and open discussions about it.

Do you think they will develop in the future?

Maybe not specifically about Chernobyl, but about the general question of nuclear power, yes. I believe we will discuss this problem openly because we must compare different views, especially the views of our scientists and our writers who research this problem, and the views of the population who are afraid of such tragedies.

Would you envisage the possibility, for instance, of groups of citizens who were taking a position similar to the greens being allowed to organise and express their point of view within the framework of a more pluralistic society?

It is not usual for our society.

But will it be in the future, do you think?

I don't know. Because such kinds of activities are not in our tradition.

Well, in the early years of Soviet power, at

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the time of Lenin, you had different political parties contesting, as you will remember very well.

Yes, but for 65 years or so we have had no such experience. Maybe it will not take place this way, but there will be something like open discussion in the mass media, in the party and trade union conferences.

Could you envisage the possibility, in a particular area, of an election in which one of the candidates stood on a platform of opposition to nuclear power stations being constructed, for instance, in that area?

You know, it is impossible to forecast such concrete things.

But in general terms would you see a development towards what we would call political pluralism, a socialist pluralism?

This is not such a simple question because the term 'pluralism' is not used in socialist countries, because we have for a long time criticised Western writers who attacked us especially from this point of view. But I remember one speech by Andropov when he said that if you explain 'pluralism' as different views, different alternatives, then it is a usual thing for our society. In public opinion, and in the apparatus, when they prepare something for the leadership, there are different views, and they compare different possibilities. This process will go on, but it will be deeper. But it does not mean that there will be opposition to the party or to socialist society. We mean some pluralistic views on a socialist basis.

Would you see, within this framework, the possibility of a women's movement developing in which the specific aspirations of women and feminist ideas could also express themselves?

Yes. New women's bodies have been introduced.

The women's councils?

Yes. This is very important, especially because our women take part in the social process, in the economy, on the same footing as men as you know. And they have the same education. Maybe we have more women than male doctors. But on the political level maybe there will be some changes. You know that we now have a secretary of the central committee of our party, Biryukova, and this is the first step to some changes. There are many women in the Supreme Soviet - I don't remember exactly how many, maybe 30% of the deputies. But I don't remember, have we women ministers?

No.

Maybe not. There must be some changes in this respect, and generally in the political influence of women. I think there will be big changes.

And how do these women's councils actually operate? What are their responsibilities? What do they do and how widespread are they now?

'Still today there is only one political figure - Lenin - and nobody else. They don't write about Stalin, about Khrushchev, about Brezhnev, about Andropov, maybe about Chernenko'



Kiev: the past looms large

You know these are only first steps. Women have some new problems. What kind of problems? They must find out for themselves. In my opinion, first of all, it is a question of improving social possibilities for women, because usually they work more than men, in the offices, the factories and the co-operatives, and then at home. And we must change the role of men in the families. That is a big question. So is the question of services. Our service sector is very bad now. It must be changed. And women are more interested in this question than men - the problem of good restaurants, of obtaining good products without having to stand in queues - the general social problems. And, as I mentioned before their political role. Maybe there's also the problem of women's independence, about which there are big discussions in our mass media. The traditional family, with the man at the head of the family, has broken down because men and women have legal equality and the same money. Their economic role in the family has changed. What should be the new model of relationships? New technological developments have given everyone new possibilities, and have changed many social institutions, and perhaps especially the family. What there will be after this I don't know. But I see the process. We can research it.

Along with the current changes that you have described, is there now likely to be a more, shall we say, objective appraisal of the Stalin period in the Soviet Union? For instance, 50 years after the first of the Moscow trials in which Zinoviev and Kamenev were condemned to death, and 49 years after the trial in which Bukharin and other Communist leaders were sentenced, we have still had no reappraisal of these trials.

The magazine *Druzhba Narodov* re-

cently announced a new novel by Antoly Rybakov, *Children of the Arbat*, about a very tragic page of our history, Kirov's death.¹ I believe it will be published. It will be a sensation, because it will be the first step in dealing with the problems of the 30s, the problems of the so-called cult of the individual with broken democracy and the arrest of many people, you know...

Yes, I certainly do.

But what about the other political figures? That's a big question. Because still today in our history there is only one political figure - Lenin - and nobody else. They don't write about Stalin, about Khrushchev, about Brezhnev, about Andropov, maybe about Chernenko ... And at the conference of teachers of marxism-leninism, Gorbachev and Ligachev mentioned that we must change our style of teaching the history of our party. It is now without personalities. And they must research the role of all political leaders, of leading members of the politburo, and explain what happened during Lenin's time, during Stalin's time, and after Stalin's time, dealing with every figure. It is our duty. But I can't answer now about the personalities you mentioned because it is a big question, and it is a difficult question, and maybe we'll have an answer in the not too distant future.

Turning to the most recent period, how do you assess the riots in Alma-Ata in December when Dinmukhamed Kunaev was replaced as first secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan by Genady Kolbin, a Russian?

I believe that it was right to replace Kunaev, who was not a good person for the job, by Kolbin who is a good person for it. The students who rioted misunderstood the situation. There were elements of tribalism² that had been fostered by the corruption that had existed in Kazakhstan.

Were there not also elements of nationalism?

Tribalism rather than nationalism, I think.

It is suggested by the Western media that the postponement of the central committee meeting fixed for December to discuss 'cadres' policy (personnel questions) indicates opposition to Gorbachev's policies from other Communist leaders. Would you like to comment?

I have no comment because I am not informed. But the postponement may be a result of difficulties in deciding what changes to propose regarding the replacement of older leaders by younger ones, rather than as a result of opposition. The problem is a very complicated one. •

1 The murder of Kirov in December 1934 served as Stalin's pretext for launching mass repression in the Soviet Union.

2 The term 'tribalism' has been used in the Soviet press to denote the existence in Kazakhstan of what we might term mafia (ethnic and family) networks.