

# **New Horizons of Soviet Policies**

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**RAJIV SHAH**



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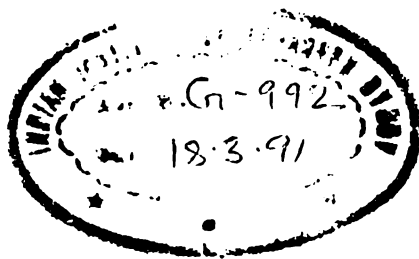
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## *Preface*

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This book is the result of the author's about one-and-a-half year experience (starting February 1986) as Moscow correspondent of the daily, *Patriot*, and *Link* newsweekly at what appears to be a crucial period in the Soviet Union's peacetime history. The new changes proposed are so fundamental and their scale and scope so wide that unless the rather unfortunate practice of reducing Marxism to a dogma is shed — and the Soviet leadership knows — no headway can be made in the desired direction. A powerful process therefore, seems to have begun for, so to say, liberating Marxism from certain worn-out formulae, repeated so often with mechanical citations from the classics on the one hand, and the Soviet Communist Party resolutions on the other. Thus, often an impression is created among certain circles outside the Soviet Union that the development of Marxism is at a standstill. Many reputed scholars during their talks with their Soviet counterparts would say that they were unable to see any development in the theory and practice on which the Soviet state was founded in 1917, at least since the 1930s. Indeed, even if there was any development, it was rather slow and not visible at least on the surface.

By the turn of 1985, especially after the CPSU Congress in the early 1986, it however, became obvious that this impression was not very exact. It began being revealed that many had done a vast amount of work towards creative development and methodical application of Marxism, in different fields, whether it be in the economic development strategy, international affairs, or history of the country, though much of it never came on the surface. The

1986 CPSU Congress documents can safely be regarded as a living example of how the creative development in theory in the past finally got official recognition from the highest body in the Soviet Union.

The process did not stop in 1986. With the beginning of 1987 scientific socialism started becoming richer. The Soviet leadership analysed contemporary life in a historical perspective, without mechanical citations, and reached the conclusion that a social force called "Braking Mechanism" in the form of bureaucratism was trying to undermine progress both in thought and in society. It is not an exaggeration, therefore, to say that the Soviet Union is beginning to be illuminated with a new thinking. Hence the title of the book.

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RAJIV SHAH



## ONE

# *Introduction*

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The restructuring underway in the Soviet Union is a far more complex task than what may appear on the surface, whether it is the internal policy or the foreign affairs. It is quite another thing that the pulse of Soviet changes in foreign affairs can be felt more easily because General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's many-sided peace proposals have already won him a wide reputation as the champion of a nuclear free and non-violent world. However, as for the internal situation, the Soviet leadership's restructuring efforts are posing as many new questions and bringing to the fore as many unresolved tasks and problems as have been sought to be solved ever since early 1986. The solutions too are proving to be far more difficult and complex than thought earlier. Yet, one can confidently say that a definite sign of possible success is the new ability to look at things realistically, without trying to evade any issue. Despite inertia at all levels — the existence of which too has been neatly recognised — this new realism has a definite social purpose: it is meant to mobilise the immense intellectual potential underlying all sections of the Soviet population, something that one can *feel* even with a very elementary contact with the Soviet people. This is the first guarantee of success of restructuring. And the second is the Communist Party's immense authority and its capacity to assert at most crucial junctures. The cadres, at least the overwhelming majority, if not all, have an immense capacity to change their style when faced with truth, and their conviction is not based on any blind faith but on a deep theoretical knowledge and practical experience.

Looking back to 1985 and early 1986, up to the period just before the 27th CPSU Congress that began on February 25, there was a phase when changes in Soviet society were seen in common perception, at least in certain sections in Moscow, Prague, Berlin (GDR), Budapest, Sofia, and Warsaw, as no more than a drive against drunkenness. The general secretary's campaign for a sober way of life was made fun of, and sometimes he was insultingly called "mineral (water) secretary". The phase could not stand the test of time, as the anti-drunkenness drive, at least in Gorbachev's scheme of things, proved to be a very minor — perhaps negligible — portion of the reforms.

Then came the phase when the "release" of Academician Andrei Sakharov from the closed city of Gorky and permission to him to occupy his apartment in the very heart of Moscow in January 1987 appeared to many foreigners as the greatest signal of restructuring. Sakharov was allowed a normal academic life; he could freely meet journalists now. He even addressed a crowded press conference in one of the smaller halls of Moscow's Cosmos Hotel. An old-time Moscow-based Japanese journalist told me in a very excited mood: Sakharov's release shows how much Gorbachev agrees with the values, Sakharov has upheld for all these years. But the journalist was wrong: at the press conference, Sakharov supported everything that Reagan said, whether it was the ABM treaty (Sakharov too wanted to give it a broader interpretation) the Soviet troops' presence in Afghanistan, or human rights. Sakharov only feebly disagreed with the Star Wars plan.

This phase also died down sooner than expected. Sakharov ceased to be an exciting "news" for more than two months, and in March 1987 he was already forgotten by his Western friends.

The reason for this was: the Soviet leadership's attempt to take up deep and serious issues and go into their theory and practice. The plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party that began on January 27, 1987 was the starting point of this new change. The plenary, from all available indications, posed certain very basic questions which earlier appeared settled or which, it was thought, would find answer on their own as the society would progress. Even most elementary questions, such as what is socialism? and what is communism? — apparently considered as having been answered — began being posed once again and answers sought within the context of what the Soviet society had ac-

complished and at what price. More complex questions pertaining to socialist democracy, its role in building and developing society, too, began being reopened, particularly in the context of restructuring.

But perhaps the most important contribution of the plenary was a rather bold identification of bureaucratism as a social phenomenon holding back and obstructing society's onward march. This has been called as the plenary's contribution to the theory of scientific socialism. Till then bureaucracy was considered a hurdle, but not a "braking mechanism"; it was believed till January 1987 that in due time bureaucracy would automatically disappear under the pressure of all-round social progress; but after the plenary it began being recognised that it was not so simple and the roots of the ailment lay in "crisis phenomenon" that had accumulated over the years. In this sense the analysis of the plenary went even ahead of the 27th CPSU Congress which had failed to notice any such factor.

The plenary also signified a radical shift in the Soviet leadership's thinking about Soviet society, past and present. Clearly, Gorbachev himself was changing towards making a deeper analysis of the societal factors influencing restructuring. Enough indications are available to show that the leadership under him no more holds the same views as it used to in 1985 or even just before the party congress began on February 25, 1986. Thus, on May 8, 1985, making a commemorative speech on the eve of the 40th anniversary of the victory over fascism, Gorbachev gave a full throated-support to Stalin's leadership in its fight against fascism. Gorbachev said, "the gigantic efforts at the front and in the rear were guided by the party, its central committee, by the State Defence Committee headed by Joseph Stalin, general secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik)." In 1987, following the plenary, this analysis completely changed. There is yet no official communist refutation of this view, but the dominant opinion has certainly changed. A number of Soviet military experts and scholars specialising in the second world war now say, Stalin was neither a great commander nor a great leader, because he committed mistakes that had tragic consequences (e.g. Academician Samsonov). A new documentary on the history of the Soviet state called *More Light* also agrees with this view; its script writer Igor Itskov says, Stalin made "miscalcula-

tions and tragic mistakes especially in the opening stages of the war". Historian Dr Gherman Trukan says, there should be a re-evaluation of the "Soviet foreign policy on the eve of the second world war." This apart, a lot of archival material is being allowed to be screened by historians and this has led to such glaring revelations as how due to Stalin's high-handedness new military technology could not be used in the early stages of the war, and how some of the best military minds were eliminated on the basis of a secret report later on found to be imperialist-planted. One historian, Dr Vasily Karpov, has even come out with the following apparently unbelievable facts: three out of five army commanders (first rank) were eliminated; all the 10 second rank army commanders were eliminated; three out of five marshals were eliminated; out of 456, 401 Polkovniks (or colonel-rank officials) were eliminated; all the 16 army commissars of first and second rank were eliminated; and 58 out of 64 division commissars were eliminated. All this happened on the eve of the second world war, and many of them had proved their worth in the fight against the White Guards during the Civil War.

On February 4, 1986, or just 21 days before the Party Congress began, in an interview to the French Communist paper *L'Humanite*, Mikhail Gorbachev called "Stalinism . . . a concept made up by the opponents of communism and used on a large scale to smear the Soviet Union and socialism as a whole". He had added, "30 years have passed since the question of overcoming Stalin's personality cult was raised at the 20th CPSU Congress and since the CPSU central committee passed a resolution on that question . . ." The word "Stalinism" and "Stalinist" are yet to find their way into the party documents, but the dominant view (approved by Gorbachev himself) at present identifies the term with what the plenary said about the "braking mechanism" of bureaucracy. The Soviet media, including the radio and TV, openly use the term, particularly to explain the braking mechanism. Scholars, writers and publicists also use the term in a similar manner. Economist Nikolai Shmelev calls the administrative methods socialism as "living Stalinism"; historian Gherman Trukan says he is working on a book on Jan Radzutak, a revolutionary, who owing to his political and personal qualities, could have been a better general secretary than Stalin, but fell victim to "Stalinist repression"; philosopher Anatoly Butenko criticises the "Stalinist rule" for giving

birth to the “administrative-bureaucratic apparatus”, and so on. Of course, there is no dearth of criticism of Stalin by name.

The analysis of “Stalinism”, under the present scheme of things, however, differs drastically from the earlier Soviet eras; the media continues to allow publication from the supporters of Stalin as well, even if it is a very small group.

In the same *L'Humanite* interview, Gorbachev said, in an answer to the question whether the changes signified a “new revolution”: “Certainly not. . . . It would be incorrect. . . .” he said. But at the 27th Congress he already began saying that the unfavourable tendencies in the economy needed “revolutionary change”. And at the January 1987 plenary he called for “a radical turn and measures of a revolutionary character” and a “truly revolutionary and comprehensive transformations in society”. This time it was not just the economy that he had in mind; though the experience primarily came from the economic restructuring process. The “main enemy” was identified as the “braking mechanism” of bureaucracy. Writer Sergei Zalygin called the main enemy as “homegrown bureaucratic Soviet socialist conservatism”, which it was pointed out had stalled the decision to changeover for the industry as a whole to the new self-financing economic management system on January 1, 1987. The changeover had to be phased out; it was decided that only 60 per cent of the industries would go over to the new scheme on January 1, 1988. Gorbachev himself said, perhaps referring to this temporary retreat, “the change for the better” was taking place slowly, the cause of reorganisation had become more difficult and the problem accumulated in society was more deeprooted than earlier thought. “The further we go with our reorganisation work, the clearer its scope and significance become: more and more unresolved problems inherited from the past come out. . . .” (January 1987 plenary).

Thus, what one finds is a definite movement towards laying a sound theoretical basis for restructuring and an attempt to analyse the present Soviet situation keeping in view the concrete social relations instead of evading or ignoring what in fact exists. Creativity of Marxism is, thus, being upheld. Gorbachev himself criticised attempts to make “authoritative evaluations” or utter “unquestionable truths that could be only commented upon. . . .” (plenary).

An analysis of Gorbachev’s speeches shows that quotations

from the Marxist classics have also become very selective; these are not meant to prove whether or not the present stage of socialism is correct or how far, but as an instruction to follow their methodology. Lenin is quoted at different places as saying that "we must be guided by experience, we must allow complete freedom to the creative faculties of the masses"; Marxism has discovered the "laws . . . and the objective logic of these changes and their historical development . . . in its chief features"; "you cannot be an ideological leader without . . . theoretical work, just as you cannot be one without directing the work to meet the needs of the cause, and without spreading the results of this theory"; "our strength lies in stating the truth"; "illusion and self-deception are terrible, the fear of truth is pernicious"; and so on.

There is also an increasing realisation that it is an unprecedented situation in which the Soviet society has found itself. Thus, Gorbachev has repeated a number of times what Lenin had noted once: that the sum total of the changes in the world economy in 1917, in all their ramifications could not have been grasped even by seventy Marxes. The modern world is much more complicated, diverse and dynamic, Gorbachev said; it faces most difficult alternatives, anxieties and hopes, but great political and physical stresses, too. In this context, Lenin is quoted as saying that Marx and Engels rightly ridiculed "mere memorising and repetition of 'formulas' that at best are capable only of marking out general tasks, which are necessarily modifiable by the concrete economic and political conditions of each particular period of the historical process . . ."

The selection of such quotations by the Soviet leader from the classics shows a new, original mood. It demands from others to be equally original and "trail-blazers and advocates of the novel and the progressive" without being bogged down into the "theoretical validation of complacency", a legacy which politbureau member Alexander Yakovlev says "we must shed". Yakovlev shows certain glimpses of dogmatism in the past: "at one time (scholars) joined in discrediting genetics and cybernetics, later in declaring that the method of mathematical modelling as applied to economics are well-nigh anti-scientific."

In this context Yakovlev emphasises, "modern socialism must first and foremost find itself . . ."

## *Today's World and New Thinking*

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A Soviet publicist, Vladimir Zamkavoi, in an unusually serious booklet entitled the *Philosophy of Aggression* (1987) makes a rather controversial declaration: "In order to avoid war", he says, analysing problems of the world in the nuclear age, "it is necessary to carry out a revolutionary restructuring of society that will lead to the elimination of class distinctions and the establishment of a socially homogeneous society". Apparently, from a Marxist perspective, there is nothing wrong in what Zamkavoi says. Nor is it a new argument, coming as it does from the mouth of an avowed Marxist. In fact, if one is to trace the history of the argument, one will have to go back by more than a hundred years, when in his immortal *Das Capital* Karl Marx approvingly quoted the trade unionist T J Dunning as saying that a 100 per cent profit makes capital ready to trample on all human laws, and there is not a crime at which it will scruple for a 300 per cent profit! A logical conclusion could be — and the publicist quoted above would readily agree — that only a collapse of the capital (or the system based on capital, i.e. capitalism) could lead to an end to the war or the threat of war.

There are countless Leftists all over the world who base their arguments on these lines. Talking about its nature, they do not make bones in openly declaring that aggressive drive, arms race and militarism are 'intrinsic' to capitalism, that this is one reason that capitalism will never agree to disarm, and that many examples could be given in support of this line of thinking, one of the most important being that the detente of the early 1970s did not live long and it only set off a rising revenge-seeking tide. The United States'

military-industrial complex, driven by the profit motive, abandoned even the minimum limitations in the field of strategic arms and modernise them.

This means, such commentators would conclude, that individual groups or "factions of the bourgeoisie" could take some or the other steps towards *detente* and disarmament, but the capitalist class's 'fundamentalism' would naturally drive it to militarism and, despite short spans of *detente*, an irreconcilable attitude would sooner or later assert itself.

From any reckoning, the argument is indeed serious. The nature of capitalism has enough examples in its store that would go to show that it can hardly favour either disarmament or peaceful co-existence with socialism. But then, a number of publicists and scholars, particularly in the Soviet Union, have done enough research and analysis to prove that capitalism should not be seen in such black-and-white terms, and that, to borrow a phrase from Jawaharlal Nehru, there are various shades of grey between the black and the white which should not be over-looked.

One such scholar, Alexander Bovin, one of the foremost Soviet publicists today who has shot into prominence on account of his unconventional analysis of the international affairs since 1985 onwards, particularly during his extempore commentaries on TV, thinks that the nature of capitalism is not something 'abstract' and that one cannot and should not ignore the "changing historical conditions and social environment where it (capitalism) exists and whose influence it cannot escape." By way of an example, he says, one can recall the prelude to and the history of the world war second: "The nature of capitalism, the basic social interests of the world bourgeoisie, pushed it towards forming a joint capitalist front against the Soviet Union. However, the joint front did not materialise. Contradictions between national, state interests proved stronger than class, social solidarity stemming from the nature of capitalism. What came about was a military alliance between the socialist state and a group of capitalist countries (USA, Britain, France etc.) spearheaded against another group (Germany, Italy, Japan etc.). Needless to say, such a possibility was regarded as unrealistic..."

Bovin thinks that at that time there was a common enemy, namely fascism, which brought capitalism and socialism together; similarly today's "common enemy" — the threat of mutual annihilation.