The Fate of the Party Apparatus Under Gorbachev

Myron Rush
The research described in this report was sponsored by the United States Army, Contract No. MDA903-86-C-0059.

ISBN: 0-8330-1136-7

The RAND Publication Series: The Report is the principal publication documenting and transmitting RAND's major research findings and final research results. The RAND Note reports other outputs of sponsored research for general distribution. Publications of RAND do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the sponsors of RAND research.

Published 1991 by RAND
1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138
The Fate of the Party Apparatus Under Gorbachev

Myron Rush

Prepared for the United States Army

RAND

Approved for public release; distribution unlimited
PREFACE

This report was written as part of an Arroyo Center project entitled “The Political Struggle in the Soviet Elite Under the Pressure of Gorbachev’s Restructuring,” within the Policy and Strategy Program. The project, which is sponsored by the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence of the U.S. Army, examines the impact of the changes Gorbachev is seeking to make in the USSR on the correlation of forces within the Soviet elite and within Soviet society at large, and the resultant implications for U.S. security interests. The study should be of interest to policymakers and policy planners concerned with Soviet affairs.

The author is a professor of political science at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.

THE ARROYO CENTER

The Arroyo Center is the U.S. Army’s federally funded research and development center for studies and analysis operated by The RAND Corporation. The Arroyo Center provides the Army with objective, independent analytic research on major policy and management concerns, emphasizing mid- and long-term problems. Its research is carried out in five programs: Policy and Strategy; Force Development and Employment; Readiness and Sustainability; Manpower, Training, and Performance; and Applied Technology.

Army Regulation 5-21 contains basic policy for the conduct of the Arroyo Center. The Army provides continuing guidance and oversight through the Arroyo Center Policy committee (ACPC), which is co-chaired by the Vice Chief of Staff and by the Assistant Secretary for Research, Development, and Acquisition. Arroyo Center work is performed under contract MDA903-86-C-0059.

The Arroyo Center is housed in RAND’s Army Research Division. The RAND Corporation is a private, nonprofit institution that conducts analytic research on a wide range of public policy matters affecting the nation’s security and welfare.
Kenneth H. Watman is the Acting Director of the Arroyo Center. Those interested in further information about the Arroyo Center should contact his office directly:

Kenneth H. Watman
The RAND Corporation
1700 Main Street
P.O. Box 2138
Santa Monica, California 90407–2138
Telephone: (213) 393–0411
SUMMARY

The Soviet political system, at least as we have known it until recently, has been dominated by the permanent staff of the Communist Party—the party apparatus, or apparat. It has been the sovereign institution that not only controlled the Communist Party, the institutions of government, the economy, and the trade unions, but that also penetrated deeply into society. During the Brezhnev years, the apparatus became lethargic, more corrupt, and ineffectual. The three closely contested successions that followed weakened the party apparatus politically as well, but without reforming it.

On becoming General Secretary in 1985, Gorbachev’s personal strategy for consolidating power departed from that followed by his successful predecessors, for he distanced himself from the apparat and did not involve himself closely in its work. Since he had a poor opinion of the party apparat, he understandably made no effort to refashion it to serve as an instrument of perestroika; what is surprising is that he allowed it to become a base for resistance to his policies under the second secretary, Yegor Ligachev. Only belatedly, in the spring of 1988, did he remove Ligachev from operational control of the Secretariat and initiate measures to reduce its capacity to intervene in state and economic affairs and to command the territorial apparatus.

The main business of the 19th Party Conference when it met in late June 1988 was to deprive the Secretariat formally of its key traditional functions and, beyond that, to deprive the entire party apparatus of its dominant place in the Soviet political system. Gorbachev called for the elimination of the apparat’s economic departments in order to reduce its capacity to intervene in the economy. Second, Gorbachev called for an end to the apparat’s domination of the Communist Party itself. Third, Gorbachev called for an end to the apparat’s domination of the state’s formal legislative bodies, the soviets, and of their executive organs.

As a result of these key reforms, the party apparatus lost a large fraction of its personnel and of its resources, but, more important, it was deprived of its sovereignty in the Soviet political system. The party apparatus was transformed from the dominant institution that had commanded the regime’s other institutions into an organization that, while still powerful, no longer exercised unquestioned authority. As a result of its decapitation, the weight of the party apparatus now shifted from Moscow to the periphery where, in the absence of powerful competitors, it still exercised predominant authority.
Gorbachev seemed to ignore the danger that by weakening the apparat he might damage his capacity to administer the country, or even to hold the country together. Local apparatus leaders began to voice complaints that the center, whose policies were responsible for the adverse local conditions under which they had to operate, nevertheless blamed them for the resulting public hostility to which they were subject. The designated defender of the party apparat’s interests had become its enemy and deprived it of the tools it needed to resist the revolution that was attacking its sovereignty. As a result, party officials were offering mostly passive resistance or were simply leaving the field of battle; they were not fighting back effectively, or even vigorously.

While party discipline was crumbling elsewhere, however, it remained strong in the top leadership, where it inhibited resistance by party officials. In early 1990, Gorbachev permitted popular demonstrations to oust provincial leaders, a new step in his movement away from reliance on the party apparatus and toward accommodation of populist sentiments. These events revealed how vulnerable the party bosses had become even in their traditional stronghold, the oblast party committee. Having been discredited by their own leaders and by the voters, having lost the constitutional basis of their vanguard role, they were now being driven from office by street mobs.

The 1990 local elections, which deprived the apparat of control in key cities, advanced Gorbachev’s program of transferring policymaking authority from the apparat to the soviets. The political consequences, however, were not what Gorbachev had intended. They revealed the weaknesses in Gorbachev’s strategy of loosening the apparat’s grip on the country while establishing his personal authority over the party and the soviets, for he still needed the apparat to implement his policies and to balance the growing radical forces led by Boris Yeltsin. In spring 1990, the provincial party apparatus began to assert itself more effectively, forcing Gorbachev to accept the formation of a new Russian Communist Party, which the apparatchiks dominated. However, despite their strong representation at the 28th Party Congress in July, the apparat was unable to prevent Gorbachev from further weakening the party’s central organs.

If the central ground that Gorbachev has tried to hold continues to weaken, he may finally be forced to choose whether to ally himself with the radicals or with the party apparatus, thereby creating a fundamentally new alignment of Soviet political forces. The party apparatus itself might also split, with traditionalists on one side—including staff specialists (ideologists, propagandists, and older economic officials)—and on the other “liberals”—presumably younger, recently co-opted,
party officials along with nationalists from the minority republics. Such a split would of course weaken the apparat’s capacity to be an independent factor and to serve as a cohesive force at a time when Soviet politics is fragmenting, but might still leave the parts with important roles to play in the new political arena.

The party apparatus, as an institution, has a questionable future in the USSR, although it still has major resources at its disposal and remains the only national political organization. If a counter-revolution were to occur, however, the party apparatus would have an important place in it, and might even provide its brain and its backbone.
CONTENTS

PREFACE ......................................................... iii

SUMMARY ....................................................... v

Section

I. INTRODUCTION ............................................. 1

II. THE APParat: ORIGINS AND HISTORY UNTIL GORBACHEV ................. 3

III. GORBACHEV’S POLICY VIS-À-VIS THE PARTY APPARAT ................. 6

   Gorbachev Distances Himself from the Party Apparatus .................... 6

   The Secretariat Attacked and Defended .................................... 8

   Gorbachev Attacks the Apparati’s Sovereignty ............................ 11

   Party Officials Rejected by the Voters .................................. 15

   Other Setbacks ..................................................................... 18

   The Problem of Perks ................................................................ 19

   The Apparat Vulnerable and Stressed ...................................... 20

IV. THE CURRENT CORRELATION OF FORCES ................. 23

V. REFLECTIONS ON THE RECENT HISTORY OF THE PARTY APPARATUS AND SPECULATIONS ON ITS FUTURE ......................... 27
I. INTRODUCTION

The Soviet political system, at least as we have known it until recently, has been dominated by the permanent staff of the Communist Party—the party apparatus, or apparat. This has long been the understanding of most students of the Soviet system, but if any question remained it should have been resolved by the recent testimony of Boris Yeltsin, who not only worked for many years as a provincial first secretary, but also worked at the center of things, as a department head on the staff of the Central Committee, as first secretary of the Moscow city party organization, and as a candidate member of the Politburo.\footnote{Boris Yeltsin, Against the Grain, Summit Books, New York, 1990.} Yeltsin speaks of “rule by the party bureaucracy” (p. 71), “that holy of holies of our system” (p. 126). The Central Committee building on Staraya Ploschad (Old Square, outside the Kremlin) is “the real citadel of power in the USSR, the place where the might of the party’s apparat is concentrated” (p. 91). Politburo members “are either career bureaucrats who have slowly climbed the ladder of the Central Committee’s hierarchy, apparatchiks to the marrow of their bones, or they are former regional or provincial secretaries” (p. 153). Politburo business is

essentially settled through discussions within the apparat. The apparat prepares a draft, which is approved by the Politburo, by people who are out of touch with the real-life situation and unaware of the actual state of affairs. Certain matters are discussed in the presence of senior officials, mainly those who prepared the material from which the apparat wrote its draft. Thus the process is, in fact, a closed circle. I was well aware of this, having spent six months as a section chief within the apparat of the Central Committee, which enabled me to observe its working from within. (p. 144)

Outside Moscow, “the power of a first secretary within his province is practically unlimited. . . . The word of a first secretary is law” (p. 70). Even allowing for Yeltsin’s partisanship and his animosity toward the party apparatus, his account fits what most outside observers had long since concluded.

The party apparatus controls the 20 million members of the Communist Party, recruiting and indoctrinating them, and mobilizing them to carry out the party line. This is a time-consuming task, but it does not have high priority for the most responsible officials. The apparat’s
chief functions have been to manage the party apparatus itself, recruiting persons with the requisite skills and political loyalties; to control the other institutions of the regime, choosing their leaders and checking on their performance; to service the Politburo, alerting it to the need for policy decisions and drafting the directives required to activate the relevant institutions; and to monitor these massive and recalcitrant bureaucracies, ensuring that the party’s directives are implemented.

The apparat has been charged with executing these vital functions and has been granted vast power to carry them out; its performance can be fairly measured by the sad state of the Soviet Union when Gorbachev became the head of the party apparatus, the General Secretary, in 1985. In the past five years, Gorbachev has moved from a concern with revitalizing the apparat to enable it to perform its traditional functions more effectively to a concern with emancipating the legislative and executive “branches” of the Soviet government from heavy-handed party control. The purpose of this report is to trace this effort and assess its success.
II. THE APPARAT: ORIGINS AND HISTORY UNTIL GORBACHEV

The party apparatus is made up of party officials who are paid with party funds and whose main work is for the Communist Party.\(^1\) They are of two kinds: "secretaries" of the party committee that, formally, elected them, who are members of that committee and may also hold prestigious jobs with non-Communist institutions; and staff officials who have lower status but often exercise considerable power. In the early years of the Soviet regime, in the mid and late 1920s, party officials made up a substantial proportion of the Communist Party's membership; in subsequent decades, however, while the Communist Party grew substantially, embracing at its peak almost 20 million members, the party apparatus grew slowly, so that in recent years it has been around one percent of the total membership. Despite their relatively small numbers, these career party officials (apparatchiks) have usually dominated the Communist Party.

For most of this period of some 60 years, the party apparatus has been the sovereign institution, controlling not only the Communist Party, but also the institutions of government, the economy, and the trade unions, and penetrating deeply into society.\(^2\) In the last part of his rule Stalin, who had conferred this sovereignty on the party apparatus, subordinated it, along with all other institutions, to his own despotic power. Following Stalin's death in 1953, when the political police lost its special status as the ruler's organ of domination, Georgiy Malenkov tried to subordinate the Communist Party to the government, which he headed. The head of the party apparatus, Nikita Khrushchev, resisted these efforts. By 1957 Khrushchev had succeeded

\(^{1}\)In addition to the relatively small and very powerful party apparatus, which is the subject of this essay, much larger bureaucracies administer the state and the economy. These bureaucrats, too, are rewarded by special perquisites and are chosen in accordance with the nomenklatura system of appointments. Their effect on society is massive and pervasive, but they do not make policy and they are normally subject to the control of the party apparatus. In this essay, I shall use the terms apparatchik and apparatchik and apparatchik and apparatchik and apparatchik to refer to party officials and the party's machinery, reserving the terms bureaucrats and bureaucracy to refer to state and economic officials and the administrative machinery that they manage. In the literature on the Soviet political system, the terms bureaucracy, apparatchik, and nomenklatura are often used to denote state and party officials jointly, but my purpose requires me to emphasize the distinction between them.

\(^{2}\)One reason for the ineffectual resistance of Stalin's opponents in the 1920s was their failure to realize soon enough that he was empowering the party apparatus to manage the country's affairs.
in restoring the sovereignty that the party apparatus had possessed before 1937. He made unduly severe demands on the party apparatus, however, calling upon it to administer the economy directly, a function for which it was ill-adapted and lacked the necessary skills.

After suffering Khrushchev's repeated reorganizations and escalating demands, representatives of the party apparatus finally took matters into their own hands, replacing Khrushchev with Leonid Brezhnev, whose limited talents and ambitions were more suited to the capacities of the party apparatus. The transfer of power left the party apparatus's sovereignty intact. In catering to the needs and comforts of the party apparatus, however, Brezhnev weakened its capacity to enforce good standards of performance on the regime's other institutions and on society. As the party apparatus became slack, undisciplined, and corrupt, the economy worsened and the quality of life declined. This caused Brezhnev's personal power and the party apparatus's dominance to be challenged by the Committee on State Security (KGB) under its long-time head, Yuri Andropov. The contest forced the indolent and aging Brezhnev to engage in strenuous political activity on behalf of his designated heir, Konstantin Chernenko, and the party apparatus, now complacent, weakened, and superannuated.

Brezhnev's death ensued before he could devise an effective defense. Andropov's challenge was crowned with success, as leadership of the country, the Communist Party, and the party apparatus itself now passed into his hands. Andropov's intention presumably was to take control of the party apparatus, reshaping it into an effective instrument for revitalizing the economy and society. But Andropov died before he could have a serious impact and defenders of the apparatus's privileges and comforts were able to replace him with Brezhnev's chosen heir, Konstantin Chernenko, rather than with Gorbachev, whom Andropov intended to take on the cause of reform. When Chernenko died a year later, the coalition Andropov had created in the late Brezhnev period defeated the defenders of the party apparatus in a brief but bitter contest.

The effect of these three closely contested successions within just a few years was to weaken the party apparatus without reforming it. The apparatus's corruption, senescence, and lethargy had been exposed but had survived the opposition's attacks. The damaged party

---

apparatus remained the country's dominant institution, but it had shown itself vulnerable to attack and no longer able to ensure that its defenders controlled the Secretariat and the Politburo of the Central Committee.
III. GORBACHEV’S POLICY VIS-À-VIS THE PARTY APPARAT

GORBACHEV DISTANCES HIMSELF FROM THE PARTY APPARATUS

Gorbachev’s personal strategy for consolidating power departed from the one followed by his successful predecessors. While Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev first concentrated on winning control of the party apparatus and then employed it to extend personal control over the regime’s other institutions, Gorbachev distanced himself from the apparat and did not involve himself closely in its work. Although he instituted purges of the central and provincial apparatus, he evidently entrusted them to factional associates who were not Gorbachev’s clients but men whom Andropov had early promoted in his struggle against the Brezhnev faction. Andropov’s former protege, Yegor Ligachev, became second secretary in charge of cadres and the day-to-day operations of the Secretariat. Gorbachev’s distancing himself from party affairs seems the more surprising inasmuch as his whole career had been made in its precincts.¹ As the quintessential apparatchik Gorbachev surely recognized its potency in the provinces, where it was needed to implement policy. Yet it will be recalled that his faction had risen to power in opposition to the Brezhnev faction, which was narrowly based on defense of the party apparat’s interests. Gorbachev may have learned from his struggle against Brezhnev that the apparat had been so weakened by complacency and corruption that an attempt to invigorate it to perform great new tasks would be unavailing. Gorbachev may also have learned from Khrushchev’s ill-fated attempt to use it to reform the Soviet Union that it was ill-suited for such purposes. Yet at this juncture there was no alternative machinery available for reforming the Soviet Union, and the apparat had too much capacity for mischief to be ignored.

Gorbachev’s unwillingness to take personal control of the apparat is understandable in light of his doubts about the apparat’s long-term suitability as an instrument for reform, and the further consideration that the urgency of his reform program left him little time for anything

¹As V. Tretyakov aptly wrote, “the fact that Gorbachev climbed the apparat stairs to become the country’s leader only proves that there were no other stairs before 1986.” (Actually, Andropov took an eccentric path to leadership, by way of the KGB.) Moscow News, November 26, 1989.
else. He initially gave highest priority to developing policies for accelerating economic growth, to opening the system to public criticism (glasnost), and to winning control over the security apparatus (the Foreign Ministry, the KGB, and, in time, the armed forces).

What is puzzling, however, is Gorbachev's failure to recognize the need to place a loyal partisan in charge of the party apparatus (or, what seems less likely, his inability to do so). As a result, not only did he fail to refashion the apparat to serve as an instrument of perestroika, but he allowed it to become a base for resistance to his policies. In his first years in office from 1985 to 1987, Gorbachev seemed uncertain whether to seek to win control of the party apparatus so that it might be made to serve his purposes or to weaken the apparat so that it might be less able to subvert them.

High-level criticism of the apparat first emerged at the 27th Party Congress in February 1986, when Yegor Ligachev publicly assumed the role of the apparat's arch-defender and Boris Yeltsin that of its arch-critic. Ligachev reproached Pravda for "lapses," an allusion to its publication of a reader's letter that had had the temerity to criticize the apparat's privileges. Yeltsin, on the other hand, was outspoken in his urgent call for a complete reorganization of the Central Committee apparatus to end its duplication of the economic ministries. Gorbachev himself did not address these matters at the 27th Party Congress. Subsequent widespread Moscow rumors that the Central Committee's economic departments were about to be abolished, however, suggest that Gorbachev may have been behind Yeltsin's proposal, or at least welcomed it. At times Gorbachev spoke candidly of the apparat's penchant for lording it over others, but he did not engage publicly in broad questioning of the institution itself. In fact, in June 1987, at a plenum of the Central Committee, he attempted to

---

2Gorbachev, as a leader who was transforming the system, clearly could have benefited from a loyal manager to administer his projects, whether as head of the Secretariat or of some other administrative machinery. Lenin evidently recognized this need in 1922 when he made Stalin general secretary, although he failed to foresee Stalin's disloyalty. After Lenin's death, Stalin became both leader and manager, with disastrous consequences for the USSR. Brezhnev was a manager who saw little need for leadership. But Gorbachev, in light of the revolution into which he was leading the Soviet people, badly needed an efficient and loyal manager.


4XXVII S'ed KPSS, p. 142. Surprisingly, however, in light of his later views, Yeltsin criticized the apparat's failure to supervise culture and its neglect of cadre appointments. Moreover, his early criticism was directed chiefly at the central apparatus. Although he advocated cuts in the territorial apparatus' staff and perks, Yeltsin seemed more concerned at this stage to protect it against the center than about its exercise of excessive powers. Subsequently, his criticism of the apparat became far more sweeping.
strengthen the central apparatus, and his own authority within it, by adding three senior figures to the Secretariat. This half-hearted maneuver failed to win for Gorbachev domination over the party apparatus, however, for he still failed to involve himself deeply in its affairs and allowed Ligachev to retain operational control of the Secretariat.

THE SECRETARIAT ATTACKED AND DEFENDED

At the next plenum of the Central Committee, on October 21, 1987, a dramatic confrontation revealed that the Secretariat and Ligachev's leadership of it were at the center of controversy, and were to remain so for the following six months. At a largely ceremonial session shortly before the 70th anniversary of the Revolution, Boris Yeltsin unexpectedly rose and delivered a brief but incisive speech in which he voiced a number of key criticisms: of the slow pace of perestroika; of its weak hold on popular support and the consequent danger that the party would suffer a loss of prestige; and of the tendency of Politburo members to eulogize Gorbachev, which Yeltsin thought might become the rule and thus discourage any criticism, as happened under previous rulers.5

The gravamen of Yeltsin's complaint, however, was his renewed attack on the Secretariat, and of its head, Ligachev. He discussed this theme at length, and returned to it repeatedly as he made his other criticisms. As Yeltsin saw it, the whole party had to be reformed, beginning with the Secretariat. Although he had expressed this view previously, at the June 1987 Central Committee plenum, nothing had changed since then.6 The Secretariat and Ligachev continued to work as before, browbeating subordinate officials, issuing documents and decisions in such numbers that local apparatus could not enforce them all, and treating local party committees rudely.7 Yeltsin's attack on Ligachev's conduct of the Secretariat echoes Lenin's famous letter to the party congress (known as his "Testament") in which he criticized

6Although Yeltsin's remarks at the June plenum have not been published, Ligachev told the October plenum that Yeltsin had there accused the Secretariat of collecting adverse materials on local party organizations in order to exert pressure on them. Incidentally, Yeltsin's complaint about the Secretariat's shabby treatment of the territorial apparatus may not be what it appears. The territorial party apparatus is his target as well, but by fostering a split between the territorial apparatus and its natural defender, the Secretariat, Yeltsin may hope to weaken both.
7Subsequently, in his final remarks, Yeltsin acknowledged that speakers' criticism of his speech was valid, that he had indeed failed the Politburo, but he did not retract his criticism of the Secretariat.
Stalin’s rudeness and called for his removal as General Secretary. Yeltsin, addressing the Central Committee, said that it was necessary to prevent what had happened previously, when Lenin’s principles were discredited and largely eliminated from the rules of party conduct, an apparent allusion to the failure to remove Stalin in accordance with Lenin’s instructions, and to the terrible events that resulted.

Yeltsin’s speech to the Central Committee was anticipated some weeks earlier in a letter to Gorbachev in which he complained of Ligachev’s poor work style, which others in the Secretariat emulated, and called on Gorbachev to change this state of affairs, in the interest of the party. Having failed to move Gorbachev by his letter, Yeltsin evidently hoped to force action by his address to the Central Committee. On both occasions he made it clear that his target was not simply Ligachev personally, but also the excessive powers of the Secretariat.

The outcome of Yeltsin’s speech was hardly what he had intended. While all of Yeltsin’s major points were discussed in the debate that followed, probably the preponderant comment was devoted to a rebuttal of Yeltsin’s charges against Ligachev and the Secretariat. Speaker after speaker rose to defend the Secretariat’s work as necessary for perestroika and to defend Ligachev’s leadership of the Secretariat. If the Secretariat adopted numerous decisions it was because its responsibilities required this, and if those who appeared before the Secretariat were subjected to unpleasant criticism they were the better for it. Two speakers in the debate did refer to shortcomings in the Secretariat’s work—Gorbachev (who complained of too many decisions) and his protege, Alexander Yakovlev—but in the end Gorbachev, too, felt obliged to defend the Secretariat as properly exacting whether one liked it or not, and took responsibility, as General Secretary, for its strict conduct of affairs. The result of Yeltsin’s speech, then, was to cause the Central Committee to rally around Ligachev and the Secretariat, and to freeze Gorbachev into an acceptance of the current Secretariat at a time when he might have preferred a more flexible posture.

Six months later, in the spring of 1988, an event supervened that unfroze Gorbachev’s position. That event was the famous Andreeva letter, an attack on perestroika by an unknown Leningrad school teacher, which initially appeared in a conservative newspaper but was subsequently republished widely in the provincial press. Coming in the midst of the election campaign for delegates to the 19th Party

---

8Yeltsin, Against the Grain, p. 179.
9While Gorbachev, as General Secretary, was formally the head of the Secretariat, speeches at the plenum make it clear that Ligachev in fact was in command.
Conference, it was evidently meant to bolster the apparat’s efforts to ensure that its partisans predominated at the conference. Evidence suggests that Ligachev was somehow implicated in the Andreeva affair, although it is questionable that he fully shared its primitive Stalinist views. Even if he was not involved in its creation, however, Ligachev appears to have played an active role in propagating it. It was widely supposed at the time that the letter had high-level support, based on its wide dissemination and the fact that for three weeks it went unquestioned in the party press.

Finally, early in April, according to Gorbachev’s partisans, he convened a two-day meeting of the Politburo that explored Ligachev’s role in the affair and led to publication in Pravda of an unsigned (hence authoritative) article condemning the Andreeva letter and offering a detailed rebuttal. Just as Yeltsin’s October attack had led to a weakening of the radicals and a strengthening of Ligachev’s position, Ligachev’s conservative attack gave a boost to radical policies and led to a serious weakening of Ligachev’s personal position. Now Gorbachev did what Yeltsin had wanted him to do in the fall: he ousted Ligachev from his informal position as second secretary and deprived him of his key responsibilities for cadres and ideology.\(^\text{11}\)

The near-term effect on Gorbachev’s policies was ambiguous. While the central apparat’s capacity to resist perestroika was thereby reduced, by the same token its capacity to give effect to Politburo decisions was brought into question. In any event, Gorbachev’s intention was not simply to weaken Ligachev’s position in the Secretariat in order to make it a reliable instrument of his own policies. Gorbachev’s personal position in the Secretariat was indeed strengthened, but this was not his main aim. By decapitating the Secretariat he weakened its capacity to intervene in state and economic affairs and to command the territorial apparats (precisely the goals, incidentally, that Yeltsin had sought). Moreover, with the Secretariat’s nerve center deprived of political clout and damaged functionally, the stage was prepared for an attack on the powers of the territorial party apparatus as well.

The main business of the 19th Party Conference when it met in late June 1988 was to deprive the Secretariat formally of its key traditional functions and, beyond that, to deprive the entire party apparatus of its dominant place in the Soviet political system. In retrospect, it appears that already in the fall of 1987 Gorbachev had intended to alter the Soviet political system by compelling the party apparatus to end its deep involvement in state and economic affairs, but was forced to delay

this program in order to deal with Yeltsin's pressure from the left. If so, the two seemingly chance events—Yeltsin's impulsive address to the Central Committee and Ligachev's effort to utilize the Andreeva letter—largely neutralized each other, causing little more than a few months' delay in Gorbachev's efforts to effectuate his strategy.

GORBACHEV ATTACKS THE APPARAT'S SOVEREIGNTY

Gorbachev finally undertook a fundamental critique of the apparatus as an institution in his report to the 19th Party Conference. He spoke of the decline in responsibility of party officials, of their frequent political and moral degradation resulting from a loss of contact with the party masses and the working people. In so doing he tacitly subscribed to the long-standing criticism of Marxist critics like Leon Trotsky in the 1930s and Milovan Djilas in the 1950s.

Having discredited the institution morally, Gorbachev proceeded to attack the sovereignty Stalin had conferred on the party apparatus. He condemned the excessive growth of its role at all levels and undertook to deprive the party apparatus of three key functions.

First, as part of his effort to end the command economy (what he referred to as the command-administrative system) and move toward marketization, he required the apparat to withdrawal from its deep involvement in economic administration. In a remarkable passage he linked the apparat's involvement in the economy to the requirements of the command-administrative system, so that as economic development became more complicated the apparat grew accordingly. Gorbachev called for an end to the apparat's "fragmentation" and its specialization according to economic tasks. He went beyond Yeltsin's call for the elimination of the economic departments in the Central Committee to demand their elimination in the territorial party organs as well.

Second, Gorbachev called for an end to the apparat's domination of the Communist Party itself. He required that the apparat be subordinated to "elected" organs, in particular to party committees and their bureaus. In effect, Gorbachev sought a reversal of the 1920s' process by which Stalin had appropriated the powers of the party committees for the apparatus. Moreover, he called for real, contested elections to replace the system of appointments to party offices by the party secretariats and their cadres' departments. These measures, even if not fully implemented, were likely to weaken the nomenklatura system that

was a major source of the apparat’s power. If fully carried out, they would deprive the party apparatus of much of its independence, placing it under the control of the elected party committees, perhaps even of the party membership as well.

Third, Gorbachev called for an end to the apparat’s domination of the state’s formal legislative bodies, of the soviets, and of their executive organs. On the national (“all-union”) level this meant that the Supreme Soviet would exercise independent legislative and executive powers instead of simply carrying out the commands of the Secretariat. Locally, the soviets would be allowed to control their own resources and be free to use them to satisfy the needs of their territories. In both instances, this meant a major loss of power by the apparat.

Although some publicists employed the 1917 slogan, “all power to the soviets,” Gorbachev’s expressed intention was to leave them subject to the strong influence of the party, but a party that had itself been liberated from tight control by the party apparatus. As a result of these key reforms, the party apparatus would lose a large fraction of its personnel and of its resources, but, more important, it would be deprived of its sovereignty in the Soviet political system. Most of its powers would be transferred to the soviets, to productive economic enterprises, and to the party committees elected by local party organizations. Political authority would be much more widely dispersed, although overall direction, presumably, was to remain in the hands of the Politburo. The role of the party’s Central Committee Secretariat, having been deprived of much of its staff, was at this juncture unclear. Overall, the proposed reforms would move the USSR in the direction of political pluralism, although it was to remain a one-party system.13

Despite his new strategy of depriving the party apparatus of its sovereignty, Gorbachev nevertheless deferred to the apparat’s continued strength as the dominant institution in the provinces and the republics. He joined Ligachev in defending the apparat’s material privileges, which was a subject of widespread discussion at the party conference, as well as outside the conference hall in the lobbies where delegates congregated. Gorbachev’s concern for their livelihood, which he continued to evidence during 1989, may have been motivated by fear for their morale at a time when they still provided important services. What is more puzzling was his proposal that each first secretary in a territorial party organization be chosen chairman of the corresponding soviet. Gorbachev thus concentrated additional power in the hands of the most powerful party officials at a time when he was trying to

---

13This was reflected in Gorbachev’s insistence on the term “socialist pluralism,” implying that political actors who were not committed to socialism could not legitimately participate in the political process.
weaken the apparat, and he gave the apparat new authority over the soviets at a time when he was trying to free the soviets from the apparat's domination. This seems to make sense only on the assumption that the first secretary was the recognized leader in each jurisdiction, and that only by placing him at its head could the soviet exercise the powers that were about to be conferred on it.

Gorbachev's paradoxical behavior reflects the complexity of his strategy. By requiring first secretaries to be initially elected to a soviet and subsequently to be elected its chairman, Gorbachev doubtless meant to subject them to public pressure on behalf of perestroika. One might speculate that he also hoped that first secretaries would discredit themselves by failing to overcome these two obstacles. Gorbachev's seemingly contradictory stance on the party apparat's relation to the soviets illustrated the inherent difficulty in downgrading an institution that still had abundant power to do harm. In retrospect, since Gorbachev was not in a position to transfer, rapidly, the plenitude of the apparat's powers to other organizations—since they did not yet exist as functioning institutions—he might have done better at the outset to seize control of the party apparatus and purge it, while placing his most trusted lieutenants in charge during the transitional period. His failure to make control of the party apparat his first priority and his toleration of Ligachev's packing it with his own men for three years may have been fatal errors.

The debate on Gorbachev's report to the conference revealed a marked diversity of views. Many apparatchiks, led by Ligachev, were defensive, acknowledging the failings of individual party officials but omitting Gorbachev's criticism of the party apparatus as an institution that had usurped power and misused it. On the other hand, some speakers who were not affiliated with the apparat went beyond Gorbachev, speaking of "a caste of untouchables" and denouncing the nomenklatura system for stifling talent and protecting the incompetent.

Yeltsin, whose insistent demand to be allowed to speak was finally approved, renewed his attack on the central apparat, criticizing its power to draft the Central Committee's resolutions and calling

---

14Oddly, Gorbachev mentioned only the second obstacle, not the first, although when the elections were held more than a year later, many first secretaries were not elected to the corresponding soviet; even when they were, if the party apparatus had lost control of the soviet (as in Moscow and Leningrad), the first secretary, whatever his popularity, could not win election as its chairman.


16Yeltsin, Against the Grain, pp. 221ff.
for its reduction to between one-tenth and one-sixth of its existing size.\(^{17}\)

The resolutions adopted by the party conference approved Gorbachev's proposals in general, although they were silent on some important features. In the next months, however, plenums of the Central Committee enacted the necessary additional measures.\(^{18}\) New Commissions of the Central Committee were interposed between the Secretariat, hitherto the brain center of the party apparatus, and the remaining departments of the Central Committee. As subsequent events revealed, this spelled the effective demise of the Secretariat as a collective body, since it rarely met thereafter.\(^{19}\) This decapitation of the apparat was accompanied by the elimination of economic departments throughout the party system and a sharp reduction in its personnel.\(^{20}\)

As a result of these amputations and the apparat's consequent partial withdrawal from involvement in central administration and from the economy, the party apparatus was transformed from the dominant institution that had commanded the regime's other institutions to an organization that, while still powerful, no longer exercised unquestioned authority.\(^{21}\) The willingness of the party apparatus, which possessed a strong voice in the Central Committee, to surrender decisive powers without a greater struggle is a puzzle that would be repeated again and again in the months ahead. A partial solution may be found in the traditional power of the center—here embodied in Gorbachev—to command and the apparat's habit of obedience. Thus, as Yeltsin

\(^{17}\)Previously Yeltsin had called for a 50 percent reduction. The actual cut in the central apparatus was considerably smaller but substantial—around 30 percent.

\(^{18}\)Pravda, July 31 and October 1, 1988. See also Izvestia Ts.K., KPSS, No. 1, 1989, for Gorbachev's memorandum "On Reorganization of the Party Apparatus," which was approved by the Politburo on September 8, 1988.

\(^{19}\)This was by no means clear at the time, however. Since the September 1988 plenum of the Central Committee increased the number of Politburo members in the Secretariat, it seemed possible that this would strengthen the Secretariat. But the sharply reduced frequency of its meetings afterwards showed that the Secretariat had in fact been downgraded as a collective organ. A year later, Chebrikov's ouster from the leadership further weakened the Secretariat as a locus of opposition to Gorbachev. Subsequently, in March 1990, it appeared that former functions of the Politburo and Secretariat were transferred to the newly established state Presidential Council and only one member of the Secretariat was appointed to this council. The Commissions of the Central Committee established in September 1988 met infrequently and were largely ineffectual.


\(^{21}\)That it retained important residual powers is apparent from the complaints of radical critics like Tatyana Zaslavskaya that this "special stratum" had not surrendered its positions. Izvestia, December 24, 1988.
complained (from an opposing radical perspective), even Central Committee members are afraid to express divergent opinions. In time, Central Committee members increasingly did speak out against the party line, but, remarkably, when it came to voting they nevertheless did as they were told.

As a result of its decapitation, the weight of the party apparatus now shifted from Moscow to the periphery where, in the absence of powerful competitors, it still exercised predominant authority. Here too, as in the center, Gorbachev sought to reduce the apparat’s autonomy and to make it accountable to the party committee that was formally its master. Despite some claims of success, it appears questionable that much progress was made. Party first secretaries did not win the popularity that the center encouraged them to seek, and with the passage of time their “recommendations” were increasingly disregarded. At the end of 1989 demonstrators would go into the streets to demand the ouster of provincial first secretaries and, presumably with the concurrence of the center, would often get satisfaction.

PARTY OFFICIALS REJECTED BY THE VOTERS

In the interval between the September 1988 plenum of the Central Committee and the elections to the Congress of People’s Deputies (March 26, 1989), party officials displayed considerable nervousness about their electoral prospects. The Politburo found it necessary to call upon nominated secretaries in the republics and provinces to get them to agree to appear on the ballot. Party officials attempted to run unopposed when they could, and were often successful, particularly in the less-developed republics. Yeltsin, who from the outset of perestroika had been the apparat’s chief opponent, asserted that the apparat existed as a mechanism and was engaged in confrontation with the masses. As the campaign drew to a close, the apparat’s conduct was subjected to growing criticism in the central press, and perhaps even to intervention from the center against its more extreme abuses.

The outcome of the election to the Congress of People’s Deputies in March 1989 realized the apparat’s worst fears. In elections where they

---

23See, for example, L. A. Onikov, a vigorous critic of the party apparatus although himself a member of the Central Committee staff, TASS, January 4, 1989, in FBIS-SOV, January 4, 1989, p. 40
24Speech by Gorbachev reprinted in Pravda, January 11, 1989.
had contrived to run unopposed, the voters often punished them by striking out their names to cause their defeat. In Moscow’s citywide election Yeltsin’s campaign, which was based on opposition to the party apparat, was rewarded with almost 90 percent of the vote. In Leningrad, numerous high party officials, including Yu. F. Solovev, the first secretary, met ignominious defeat. Roughly one-third of the provincial first secretaries in the Russian Republic were defeated. The outcome appeared to catch the party apparat by surprise, despite its pre-electoral uneasiness. Although party officials had conducted opinion surveys, at least in the large cities, they evidently had not realized how seriously they had been discredited in popular opinion.

The disdain of the intellectual class for the party apparat was long-standing, although it was presumably tempered by respect for the apparatchik’s power. Ordinary workers may have respected not only their power but also their quality as self-made men, since the party apparat has long been a chief means of upward mobility for energetic and ambitious members of the poorer classes. Nevertheless, the hostility displayed by the common man in the March 1989 elections clearly antedated Gorbachev’s 1988 campaign downgrading the apparat. Already at the 19th Party Conference in 1988, V. V. Bakatin had remarked that the opinion that the apparat enjoyed fantastic privileges was deeply rooted in ordinary consciousness and difficult to overcome. Everyone at the conference, he said, doubtless had heard this opinion expressed repeatedly. Bakatin seemed to intimate, however, that this opinion had only recently become deeply rooted, having been fostered with the help of certain persons, presumably in the period of glasnost when it became possible to speak openly of such things. (Boris Yeltsin, among others, had done so loudly and often; Gorbachev, incidentally, has never encouraged the view that the apparat has excessive privileges.)

However it arose, the widespread envy of the party apparat for its perquisites become a powerful force capable of destroying the careers of many apparatchiks and even raising a question about the apparat’s capacity to serve as a bulwark of the Soviet system. Opposition to

---

27 The mutual antagonism of the intellectual class, many of them descendants of the prerevolutionary middle class, and the party apparat, most of them descendants of prerevolutionary workers and peasants, is perhaps in some measure colored by this historical circumstance.


29 According to Yeltsin, it is universally believed by Soviet people that “to make a career in the party a person must excel at adapting his personality and convictions to whatever is required by the powers that be at any given moment. He must be dogmatic and learn to do or say one thing while thinking something else.” Against the Grain, p. 153.
Moscow from the ethnic minorities had already begun to win support from within the local party apparatus. Now the appearance of opposition to the party apparatus in the Russian Republic as well raised a serious question about the party apparatus’s coherence and its capacity to serve as an integrating force to maintain the Soviet Union. The viability of the Union itself was coming into question.

At this critical point for the future of the party apparatus and perhaps for the Soviet Union as well, Gorbachev confronted a critical choice. He could execute a tactical retreat from his efforts to discredit the apparat and move toward a renewed alliance with its conservative supporters like Ligachev and V. M. Chebrikov, or alternatively, he could renew his attacks on the apparat in order to align himself better with the radical mood of Soviet opinion in Russia and the more independently minded republics of the Baltic and Caucasus. If Gorbachev indeed deliberated on such a choice, in the end he not only rejected the notion of a tactical shift to repair the damaged apparat, but inflicted new wounds on it, justifying the apparat’s electoral defeats as due to its alienation from the people. According to Gorbachev, the election results supported the party’s line of restructuring its apparat. Gorbachev gave no sign that he recognized the danger that a further weakening of the apparat might damage his capacity to administer the country, or even to hold the country together. Shortly afterwards, at the April plenum of the Central Committee, Gorbachev inflicted new blows on the party machine when he forced large numbers of apparatchiks to “resign.”

The party apparatus was now encouraged to concentrate on internal party affairs and daily contacts with working people, rather than on issuing commands to governmental and economic bodies and to society. But this did not necessarily lead to an improvement in affairs. It seems likely, for example, that the apparat’s withdrawal from involvement in the economy, though only partial, contributed to the slackening of the economy during 1989. After all, under the command-administrative system, the party apparatus performed essential functions. Thus, Pravda had occasion to lament that some party bodies, having surrendered the management reins as ordered, simply

---

30 After his transfer from the KGB to the Central Committee Secretariat in September 1988, Chebrikov became more deeply involved in the work of the apparat and increasingly alienated from Gorbachev’s policies. He was ousted from the leadership at the September 1989 Central Committee plenum.
32 See, for example, the editorial in Pravda, August 11, 1988, which complains of incompetent interference by party officials in the work of economic organs and scientific institutions, complaints that continued to be heard off and on in 1989.
withdrew from production matters. Gorbachev, however, showed no concern that by downgrading the party apparatus he had created a major gap in the existing mechanism before he was prepared to replace it with a new one.

OTHER SETBACKS

Besides its substantial rejection by the Russian voters, the party apparatus during 1989 suffered severe setbacks in other arenas as well. In July 1989 coal miners in the chief mining areas of Russia and the Ukraine went on strike, rejecting the authority of their party-managed trade unions as well as of the leaders of the local party apparatus itself. After initial hesitation, the central leadership responded by castigating the local party organization and the trade unions for having become alienated from their own people and by promising the strikers that their demands would shortly be met. The center's failure to deliver on these promises left the miners strongly dissatisfied and increasingly antagonistic to both the center and the local authorities. But the center's willingness to make scapegoats of the provincial party apparatus accentuated the growing split between them. Local apparatus leaders began to voice complaints that the center, whose policies were responsible for the adverse local conditions under which they had to operate, nevertheless blamed the local leaders for the resulting public hostility to which they were subject.

Even as the territorial party apparatus became generally hostile to the center, some of its parts became mutually antagonistic, as strong national feelings gained expression owing to glasnost. Even when the local party apparatus was not infected by nationalist feelings directly (as readily happened, since the cadres were mostly indigenous), its leaders often found it expedient to accommodate to nationalist sentiments so as not to lose influence among the people. In Azerbaijan and Armenia, as the two peoples moved toward hostilities during 1989, their apparats did likewise, and communication between their party leaders broke down. In Georgia, the leadership discredited itself in April 1989 when it called upon the center for military force to repress peaceful demonstrations. The resulting killings turned Georgians against Moscow and left the Georgian apparat with a damaged capacity.

---

33Pravda, August 1, 1989. The editorial called on party officials to employ "political methods of leadership" (whatever they might be), but it implied that the apparat's complete withdrawal from economic affairs was unwise.

34These complaints were voiced at high-level party meetings in April and July 1989; the proceedings were published.
for either loyal execution of Moscow's commands or expediential accommodation to the people's intensified nationalist feelings.

The party organizations in each of the three Baltic republics were gravely weakened even though they rejected Moscow's ethnic policies and supported independence from the Soviet Union. Control of the government passed from the party apparatus to an indigenous popular front. By the end of 1989, the apparats in the six republics of the Baltic and Caucasus were either not responsive to Moscow's commands or not able to exact obedience from the people, or both at once. Matters had gone so far that Moscow could no longer rely on the apparatus in these republics to enforce the national draft, and some party officials were even encouraging their fellow citizens to desert the Soviet army.

Weakened discipline in party organizations was not limited to the minority republics, but was evident in increased strains in the whole hierarchical structure of the Communist Party. Not only did Communists begin to assert themselves against their party bureaus and first secretaries, as Gorbachev of course intended, but entire city organizations began to disregard the commands of their provincial bosses and to quarrel with them. By the end of 1989, such insubordination became widespread in the Russian Republic and elsewhere.

THE PROBLEM OF PERKS

What has drawn people to careers in the party apparatus, apart from the exercise of power and perhaps the attractions of the Communist ideology, has been the promised perquisites. While longstanding, they became more generous under Brezhnev. Depending on their rank and location, apparatchiks and their families had access to special health-care facilities, special stores and services, better apartments and, in the higher echelons, limousine service and dachas. These were obtained more effectively by the pursuit of high places in the party apparatus than by the pursuit of rubles. Of course, they were available to members of other institutions as well, as defenders of the party apparatus often pointed out, but public anger focused on party officials, perhaps because they, unlike the others, enjoyed power as well as privileges, and they had used this power to confer material privileges on themselves.35

These had now come under attack—not by Gorbachev, but by ordinary people and their populist leaders, like Yeltsin. By the end of the

35Evidently the salaries of party officials compared unfavorably with those of their opposite numbers in enterprises and they may have received a larger portion of their income in perks.
year, party leaders had responded by disavowing many of their privileges, with the Central Committee staff serving as a model for the territorial party organizations. Addressing the Supreme Soviet, Ye. M. Primakov, chairman of its Commission on Privileges, revealed that there were no longer special buffets for Central Committee staff (or for staff of the Council of Ministers) apportioned according to rank; instead, all used one buffet.\textsuperscript{36} Similarly, access to motor transport was newly restricted to party workers on call. Evidently, however, party organizations were not all moving with equal fervor to divest themselves of privileges. Primakov read a telegram from Sakhalin, who claimed to have taken the lead in giving up special privileges and called on other party leaders to do the same.\textsuperscript{37}

To compensate for this loss of privileged income, party workers' salaries were raised, effective October 1, 1989. Increased monetary income was also justified by the relatively higher salaries in other institutions and by the higher qualifications of new recruits to the party apparatus.\textsuperscript{38} This change in the mode of remuneration for party officials, however, did not improve the apparat's image. On the contrary, it led to a new public outcry against the apparat for giving themselves higher salaries at a time when inflation was on the rise and the government was trying to hold down wage increases. Party officials doubtless valued the monetary compensation for their loss of material privileges, but they publicly lamented that the unfortunate timing of the measure had increased public hostility.

**THE APPARAT VULNERABLE AND STRESSED**

With their power under attack from above and below, with their perks criticized by ordinary people and populist politicians, party officials were subjected to substantial stress. They were additionally called upon to improve the lives of their constituents at a time when they

\textsuperscript{36} A Moscow News correspondent was disappointed by the legendary Central Committee buffet when he finally encountered it. 

\textsuperscript{37} Moscow Domestic Service, February 13, 1990, in FBIS-SOV, February 14, 1990, pp. 39–40. "In the recent past in many publications of the newspapers, radio, and central television, there have been reports that in some places, heads of town committees, rayon committees of the CPSU, oblast and central party bodies still enjoy privileges in the form of service dachas, hospitals, hunters' cabins, buffets, and other attributes of the time of stagnation (under Brezhnev). There is none of this in Sakhalin. Therefore we have the obvious and indisputable right to appeal to the conscience of a Communist and a citizen, or any party leaders who still enjoy special benefits. Stop discrediting the party and its Communists, the overwhelming majority of which have never enjoyed any privileges."

\textsuperscript{38} Gorbachev in Pravda, February 12, 1990.
center's policies were driving the economy down. Beyond this, they were told to "restructure themselves." Having been socialized under the so-called administrative-command system, however, where their office conferred the authority they required, they found it hard to win authority by their performance. It was difficult for them to open their affairs to the scrutiny of party committees, to reason with and persuade their subordinates and opposite numbers, and to win acceptance by the people.

Not long after the 1988 party conference, Pravda had noted the confusion and uncertainty of party officials as a result of the new demands made on them. Unsure of what was now expected of them, doubtful that they could fulfill the vaguely defined expectations, uncertain of what role they were to perform in the new system that was being fashioned without a clear blueprint, deprived of the material rewards that had formerly assured them of their personal worth, their morale plummeted. They had been largely abandoned by many of the apparat's top officials who were supposed to protect their interests. True, conservative figures, like Ligachev, still spoke out in their favor in the top party bodies, but they seemed unable to cope with the ingenious and deceptive tactics of Gorbachev. The official most directly engaged in administering the work of the entire party apparatus, cadre secretary G. P. Razumovsky, spoke of a wave of resignations of party leaders during 1989. By some irony of history, in the spring of 1988, the designated defender of the party apparat's interests had suddenly become its enemy and deprived it of the tools it needed to resist the revolution that was attacking its sovereignty. As a result, party officials were offering mostly passive resistance or were simply leaving the field of battle; they were not fighting back effectively, or even vigorously.

The apparat's vulnerability was forcefully demonstrated again in the fall of 1989, when it came under renewed attack. The question at issue was the long-standing Leninist principle that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) exercised "a vanguard role" in the Soviet system. According to Article 6 of the 1977 Constitution: "The leading and guiding force of Soviet society and the nucleus of its political system, of all state organizations and public organizations, is the CPSU." As their "nucleus," the CPSU arguably had the power to command

---

40Moscow Television Service, February 18, 1990, in FBIS-SOV, February 20, 1990, p. 52. In Kharkov, four of the nine district committee first secretaries resigned giving various pretexts. There were also resignations from the province committee staff. Careers in the party apparatus had lost their attraction and party officials were seeking other jobs. Izvestia, April 18, 1990, p. 2.
state and public organizations, but this power was of course exercised not by the Communist Party as a whole but by its apparatus. Thus the call to eliminate Article 6 was meant not simply as an attack on the CPSU's status as the sole party, but also as an attack on the apparat's power to command the economy and the state.41

In November, the radical Inter-Regional Deputies Group launched a concerted attack on Article 6 in the Congress of People's Deputies. Gorbachev at first offered a defense of Article 6, although it was based on technical grounds, not on principle. In December he retreated further, and in February he joined the article's critics. He asked a plenary meeting of the Central Committee to reject the CPSU's constitutional status as the vanguard party and called on the party instead to win its vanguard role in electoral contests, if necessary against the opposition of other, newly formed, political parties.42 As before, the Central Committee, though still packed with apparatchiks, obliged with hardly a dissenting voice. Although party discipline was crumbling elsewhere, it remained strong in the top leadership, where it inhibited resistance by party officials. The central party staff continued to draft such party measures, but it did so under the close direction of the party's leaders without consulting the provincial apparat and, ironically, it no longer favored the interests of the party apparatus.43

Deprived of constitutionally assured status as the nucleus of state organizations, the party apparatus could dominate the new legislatures—at least in the major cities, where the Communist majorities were independently minded—only by invoking party discipline. This it attempted to do, but the time was long since gone when party members automatically executed the apparat's commands. For the same reason, it is questionable that the Communist delegates would obey the party simply because of the added consideration that the Constitution said it was "the nucleus" of state organizations.44 Article 6 had more symbolic than real importance, but the fact that liberal forces could compel the party apparatus to surrender Article 6 was indicative of the new balance of forces in the political arena.

41See, for example, the speech of coal miner K. G. Fisenko at the February plenum of the Central Committee, who said that the leading role actually belonged not to rank-and-file Communists or to the party, but to its apparat. TASS International Service, February 5, 1990, in FBIS, February 6, 1990, p. 59.

42Presumably, Gorbachev really wanted Article 6 eliminated but, as in so many of his actions, it cannot be ruled out that he was merely accommodating to the preponderant political forces, or that he was obliged to accept a desired outcome prematurely.

43See the plenum speech of V. G. Anufriyev, second secretary of the Kazakh Central Committee, in Pravda, February 8, 1990.

44Some congress delegates, however, argued that even if the Communist Party were to lose an election somewhere it would remain the ruling party because of Article 6. Moscow Domestic Service, November 13, 1989, in FBIS-SOV, November 15, 1989, p. 43.
IV. THE CURRENT CORRELATION OF FORCES

This new political balance resulted in good measure from the increased importance of public opinion in politics and the worsened standing of the party apparatus in that opinion. According to a poll conducted by a party agency, over one-half of those polled were sharply critical of the party apparatus; among Communists almost three-fourths believed that the apparatus was dominated by mediocre or poorly qualified officials.\(^1\) Moreover, since in the popular mind to think of the party was to think of its apparatus, the party's prospects appeared little better than those of the party apparatus.

Early in 1990 the campaign to force the Communist Party to surrender its political monopoly reached a crescendo. The greatly strengthened liberals were joined by masses of people demonstrating in the streets, a new force that had played no role in domestic politics since the 1920s. Encouraged by the Gorbachev faction, a large Moscow demonstration called for the elimination of Article 6. At about the same time, demonstrations in provincial capitals began to demand, in the name of rank-and-file Communists and even ordinary citizens, the ouster of the first secretary, his deputies, even the entire party bureau. In Stalingrad, Tyumen, Ulyanovsk, and elsewhere, experienced first secretaries were forced from office; in some provinces the leaders, though chastened, were allowed to continue, perhaps because of intervention from Moscow on their behalf. No longer were party officials leaving office decorously under cover of retirement; their sins were now being publicly condemned.

That Gorbachev permitted popular pressure to oust high leaders—perhaps, in some instances, even instigated the demonstrations—represented still another step in Gorbachev's movement away from reliance on the party apparatus and toward accommodation to populist sentiments. At the same time, these events revealed how vulnerable the party bosses had become even in their traditional stronghold, the oblast party committee. Having been discredited by their own leaders and by the voters, having lost the constitutional basis of their vanguard role, they were now being driven from office by street mobs. Stalin, and perhaps Lenin, would have been outraged. Yet Gorbachev continued to claim that the party was being strengthened by his program, that by removing it from involvement in the command-administrative system he was restoring its prestige.

\(^1\)Literaturnaya Gazeta, December 13, 1989.
Speakers frequently called attention to the increased percentage of Communists in the soviets, disregarding the fact that their numbers had been deliberately held down in the past in order to give “representation” to the non-party masses. Except for dissidents, most people interested in politics had long ago found their way into the party of 20 million. Granted that the Communist Party had not been discredited to the same degree as the party apparatus, but its prestige had clearly suffered as the mass media made repeated revelations about its past deeds. According to Literaturnaya Gazeta, not much more than one-half of those recently polled looked to the party to improve their lives, while almost one-third did not believe the party capable of winning a vanguard position. Moreover, from its peak at the beginning of 1989, party membership began a decline that became more rapid in the last quarter of the year, during the collapse of the East European Communist parties, ending 1989 down a quarter of a million. Clearly the Communist Party could hardly escape untouched from the discrediting of the party apparatus.

As the March 1990 local elections approached in the Russian Republic, party officials were in a weaker position to manipulate the elections than they had been just a year previously. Consequently, only around a third of the provincial first secretaries chose to campaign for delegate to the Russian Supreme Soviet, and five of the 25 met defeat. The outcome reflected not only public opposition to party officials, but also the officials’ difficulty in finding time to campaign intensively against tough opposition while trying to run the party committee and maintain control of the province’s affairs. As a result, lower echelon party officials sometimes forced provincial secretaries to choose between withdrawing from the electoral campaign or resigning their party position.

The 1990 local elections did advance Gorbachev’s program of transferring policymaking authority from the apparat to the soviets. Their political consequences, however, were not what Gorbachev had intended, for they revealed the weaknesses in Gorbachev’s strategy of loosening the apparat’s grip on the country while establishing his personal authority over the party and the soviets. In the Russian Republic especially, his centrist maneuvering between liberals and

---

4 Dewn Mann, “The RSFSR Elections,” Radio Liberty, Report on the USSR, April 13, 1990, p. 12. On the other hand, around two-thirds of Russian okhrom first secretaries succeeded in both winning election to the oblast soviet and in being chosen as its chairman, testifying to the residual strength of the party apparatus in provincial Russia.
conservatives met a serve setback owing to the polarization of political forces in the Russian Supreme Soviet. Whereas the liberals controlled roughly half the deputies and supported Boris Yeltsin for chairman, the other half, which was under the influence of the party apparatus, wavered between Gorbachev’s candidate, A. V. Vlasov, and I. K. Polozkov, the Krasnodar first secretary, whose views resembled Ligachev’s. Gorbachev’s worst fears were realized when his archenemy among liberals, Boris Yeltsin, on a third vote narrowly secured the needed majority. While the Russian Supreme Soviet was polarized, liberals controlled the soviets in Moscow and Leningrad and elected Gavriil Popov and Anatoly Sobchak as their chairmen. Thus, while Gorbachev succeeded in transferring authority to the soviets, both he and the party apparatus suffered major defeats in their efforts to control the newly empowered bodies. Despite his acquisition of the new office of President of the Soviet Union, with its strong powers, and his continued strength in the All-Union Supreme Soviet, Gorbachev now lacked a strong and reliable political base in either the party apparatus—which he had antagonized and, as an institution, no longer followed him blindly—or in the chief territorial soviets, which were controlled by liberals.

As a result, Gorbachev was increasingly challenged in the heart of the empire, in Russia itself. Against his early opposition, the Russian Republic was in process of establishing its own Communist Party and, contrary to Gorbachev’s program of sharply reducing party staffs throughout the country, it intended to recruit its own substantial staff. Boris Yeltsin, who unlike Gorbachev (1) had won popular elections (in Moscow and Sverdlovsk) and (2) had been chosen head of the Russian Supreme Soviet by a democratically elected legislature, wanted Russia to become “sovereign,” with laws superior to the Soviet Union’s and with its own price system and currency and its own policy toward the minority republics. Although Gorbachev had succeeded in establishing a personal political base outside the Communist Party in the office of the President, with its own council and substantial powers, his political position was actually growing weaker and was in danger of crumbling under the attacks of a weakening party apparatus on the one hand and a growing liberal movement on the other. The central ground that Gorbachev had tried to hold continued to weaken, facing him with a

---

6See, for example, Polozkov’s speech to the 19th Party Conference, where in his concluding words he criticized Gorbachev for neglecting the need for party discipline. XIX Vsesoyuznαιя Konferentsia, Vol. I, pp. 233–234.

7In Leningrad the party first secretary, B. V. Gidasnov, did not even run for the soviet, while in the Moscow soviet party first secretary Yu. A. Prokofiev was in the minority.
choice of whether to ally himself decisively with the liberals or the party apparatus.

The party apparatus, having suffered a deep loss of power after the spring of 1987, was able to reverse the decline in the spring of 1990. The partial recovery was effected without help from the Kremlin—in fact, it had to override Gorbachev's opposition—and was based on the apparat’s residual strength in the Russian countryside and on an open appeal to newly resurgent Russian nationalism. At a founding congress in June 1990 that was dominated by the provincial apparatus a new Russian Communist Party was established under the leadership of Ivan Polozkov. It sought to “recapitate” the party apparatus by restoring power to the CPSU's central party organs or, alternatively, by establishing a strong central apparatus in the Russian Communist Party. Despite its strong representation at the CPSU’s 28th Party Congress and its delegates' open display of hostility to the Gorbachev leadership, the Russian Communist Party failed to further its objectives at the congress. Arrayed against it were a substantial liberal faction, the palpable hostility of a large section of popular opinion, and, deftly playing upon the apparat's fears, Gorbachev with his impressive tactical skills. The powers of the Politburo and the Secretariat were not restored but further eroded and the 28th Congress obediently surrendered some of the party's remaining claims to exercise rule.

The recently resurgent party apparatus thus lost momentum, and when it reassembled in the second phase of its founding congress, in early September, it was wracked by divisions and was unable to adopt a coherent and meaningful program. Large numbers of Russians were leaving the Communist Party and some Russian party organizations disputed the authority of Russian Communist Party. The summer of 1990 thus brought fresh setbacks to the apparat, leaving its near-term prospects uncertain but hardly bright.
V. REFLECTIONS ON THE RECENT HISTORY
OF THE PARTY APPARATUS AND
SPECULATIONS ON ITS FUTURE

High among the surprises that awaited western Sovietologists after
1985 was the ease with which the party apparatus was to be cast down
from the heights of power. Sixty years of the exercise of command had
left it arrogant, incompetent, and corrupt; nevertheless, lacking leisure
and luxury, the apparat had no cause to grow soft, so there is a puzzle
as to why it failed to manifest a will to defend itself. Although the
forces deployed against it were not insignificant and were led (insofar
as they were subject to leadership) by an able tactician, they were only
emergent and still largely diffuse. Nevertheless, under the far from
powerful blows of a largely uninformed public opinion and of the nascent
soviets, the party apparatus was decapitated and deprived of its power
to command other institutions and society.

That Sovietologists did not anticipate the apparat’s overthrow was
due partly to their disregard of the abundant evidence that the party
apparatus had grown weak and undisciplined in the long years of
Brezhnev’s rule¹ and at its end had been able to muster only weak
resistance to the attacks of a faction allied with the political police.
But Sovietologists also had grounds for exculpation. How could any
one anticipate that a leader and designated defender would be imposed
on the party apparatus who was contemptuous of their qualities and
work habits and who listened instead to intellectuals who wanted to
shape Soviet society according to a model of which they had little
direct experience? As a historical mutant, relatively unshaped by his
known life experiences, Gorbachev may have deceived his supporters
no less than foreign observers. Moreover, how could the 1985 observer
anticipate that this imaginative but also destructive genius would act
on the basis of a marvelous but distant vision of what some day may
indeed be realized but which had little foundation in current Soviet
realities. The results to date of Gorbachev’s utopianism might suggest
that Brezhnev’s lethargy was the product of prophetic insight.

In light of the party apparat’s recent record of displaying a weak will
and offering feeble resistance to its opponents, does it still have a

¹According to Yeltsin, Brezhnev concerned himself with the country less and less.
"The secretaries of the Central Committee followed his example, so we [in the provinces]
found ourselves working completely on our own. We did receive occasional instructions,
but they were pure eyewash, issued merely for the record." Against the Grain, p. 87.
future? Despite its discrediting since 1985, and the severe weakening of party discipline among the many millions of ordinary Communists, the apparat's assets should not be discounted. Besides the corrupt, the cynical, and the incompetent, the apparat includes many able managers, experienced in the exercise of power, and it has abundant assets—buildings, newspapers, equipment, funds, computers, and data bases—which other, nascent political organizations largely lack. Moreover, some recent developments can give the party apparatus grounds for hope.

If the Communist Party in the newly assertive Russian Republic acquires a large republican party staff to give cohesion to its existing apparatus in the provinces, as it intends to do (although Gorbachev means to prevent this), perhaps the party apparatus will reemerge, phoenix-like, from the ashes of the recent defeats inflicted on its central staff. But even if a Russian republican apparatus succeeds in coming into being, it can hardly hope to acquire command over a Russian government that is headed by its mortal enemy, Boris Yeltsin.

For some months Russian party officials have been trying to forge an alliance between Russian workers and Russian nationalist intellectuals, but it has been impeded by the workers’ hostility to the apparat and its remaining privileges and recently increased salaries. On the other hand, Yeltsin's bid for popular support in Russia is favored by his long-standing attacks on the apparat (and by his opposition to any policy of early price increases for food).

In the long term, the party apparatus's prospects depend heavily on the future evolution of Soviet federalism and of the emergent Soviet political system. Assuming the most hopeful outcome—that Gorbachev succeeds in creating a market economy—the party apparatus seems doomed, for there would be little need for the apparat in such a regime. Similarly, if, as Russian imperialists fear, the Soviet empire divides, not only would the apparat be fragmented, but it seems doubtful that the nationalists dominating the component republics would find an important place for the local party apparatus, even in Russia. The apparat's best prospects may depend on a resurgence of the forces that were dominant before Gorbachev came to power and are threatened by what has happened since.

Is perestroika truly irreversible, or is a counterrevolution possible? If secessionist movements continue to endanger the Soviet Union, if the social order is jeopardized by the continued deterioration of the

---

2Note the observation of Aleksandr Gelman based on his experience as a deputy in the Congress of People's Deputies: "The Party apparatus turned out to be more orderly and intelligent than I had thought." (David Shipler, "A Reporter at Large," The New Yorker, June 25, 1990.)
economy and rising crime and class antagonisms, if the new economy reform program imposes unacceptable sacrifices or simply fails, it seems likely that a powerful rightist movement could emerge and might even grow strong enough to seize power. If so, the abundant but heterogeneous conservative forces—the Army, political police, economic planners, industrial and agricultural administrators, and Russian nationalist-imperialist intellectuals—might come together under the leadership of the party apparatus. As already noted, however, the current animosity between workers and party officials is a serious obstacle to the apparat’s chances of forming such an alliance. But even if the party apparatus did not provide the leadership or the cohesive force for such an alliance, it would still have an important role to play because of its remaining resources and its ability to provide experienced generalists and administrators to run a new state machine.

Absent a counterrevolution, the party apparatus will be unable to restore its sovereignty and might even succumb to a popular revolution like those that have overthrown the apparat in Eastern Europe. Its capacity to create mischief in the months and years ahead, however, should not be underestimated. At a time when power has become widely diffused, the apparat, despite its own fragmentation, remains the only national political organization. It is in a position to disrupt the work of local soviets and to mobilize party and mass opinion against national policies that it opposes. Unable to rule, it may still have sufficient strength to obstruct the forces that are trying to restore the economy and the country.

To sum up, absent a counterrevolution, the party apparatus, as an institution, has a questionable future in the USSR. On the other hand, if a counterrevolution were to occur, the party apparatus would probably have an important place in it, and might even provide its brain and its backbone.