Wall' still seemed unrealistic and propagandistic. In November 1989 the Wall did come down, and communist rule in Eastern Europe collapsed. The Soviet Union took all this in its stride, and in 1990 showed itself ready to accept German reunification and to agree a phased withdrawal of its troops. The year concluded with a treaty reducing conventional armed forces in Europe to equal ceilings for East and West, thus on paper abolishing any special Soviet threat, together with a joint declaration affirming that its signatories 'are no longer adversaries'.[5] Meanwhile the USA, UK and France had removed substantial forces from Europe for use against Iraq in a UN operation that enjoyed (slightly uneasy) Soviet support. The world was indeed changed. But not completely: for the USSR sought to evade the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty by (inter alia) relabelling its excess tanks as Naval units, while in 1991 its Prime Minister 'revealed' a Western plan to flood it with banknotes, thus creating hyperinflation and so bringing to power the 'advocates of swift privatisation' at fire-sale prices.[6] Such attitudes underline the extent to which the ending of the Cold War was dependent on the internal transformation of the Soviet Union, a process that resumed at breakneck speed after the collapse of a reactionary coup attempt in August 1991.

5. Schweitzer, *Changing Analysis of the Soviet Threat* pp. 262, 284; *Keesing's*, 36060, 37838

6. *The Independent*, 19 Jan. 1991 p. 13 and 11 Feb. 1991 p. 8 (also 24 Oct. 1989 p. 1 – admitted Soviet breach of ABM treaty – and 25 July 1991 p. 1 – East European claims of breach of INF treaty); *Keesing's*, 38012

CHAPTER TWO

The Domestic Background in the Soviet Union and the United States

Gorbachev once talked of the 'organic tie between each state's foreign and domestic policies. . . . A change in the domestic policy inevitably leads to changes in the attitude to international issues'.[1] That the sources of foreign policy are to be found primarily in internal affairs has been claimed also for many other countries. Thus one school sees the *primat der innenpolitik* as the key to German foreign policy since Bismarck, while decolonisation is as clearly linked with developments in the metropolis as in the dependencies: 'we British', one Commonwealth Secretary declared, 'have lost the will to govern'.[2] But however important the general domestic origins of foreign policy, we have space here only for a brief survey of those internal developments that had a significant bearing on the international behaviour of the two superpowers.

THE SOVIET UNION AFTER 1945

At the end of the Second World War Stalin faced two obvious internal problems, the satisfaction or containment of the aspirations it had unleashed among his subjects, and the reconstruction of a devastated land. From the outset he had recognised that people were more likely to fight for Russia than for communism; so tsarist

1. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika* (paperback edn, 1988) p.132
2. Sir Roy Welensky, *Welensky's 4000 Days* (1964) p.319

heroes and military practices were reinvoked, the Orthodox Church was allowed to revive, and ideological control by the Communist Party relaxed. The final German surrender brought spontaneous pro-Allied demonstrations in Moscow and wild rejoicing by a populace that hoped for better things than the 1930s. Much of the country, though, had been occupied by the Germans, much of the army exposed to foreign influences either as prisoners or as a victorious force in richer lands. Stalin was pathologically suspicious of all such contacts: former Soviet prisoners were often simply reassigned to Siberia, and by 1948 at least 20 per cent of the Soviet administration in Germany is supposed to have been arrested. Nor were Stalin's fears always groundless: Ukrainian guerrilla resistance to Soviet reoccupation ran at a high level for years, while its Lithuanian counterpart killed some 20,000 Soviet troops in 1944–8; equally the 1940–1 deportations were resumed, and by 1949 a quarter of the population of the Baltic states had been removed, to be replaced by Great Russians.[3]

It is therefore unsurprising that a major postwar theme was the restressing of socialist ideology, of the uniqueness of Soviet Russia, and of the threat from outside; already by August 1945 people were being reminded of 'the basic fact that our country remains the only socialist state in the world. . . . The victory achieved does not mean that all dangers to our state structure and social order have disappeared'. This theme was driven home during the February 1946 'election', the distinctiveness of the USSR, the correctness of prewar policies, and the need to resume economic growth interrupted by the German attack constituting the chief themes of Stalin's and Molotov's addresses.[4] Later that year Zhdanov embarked on an ideological clamp-down and literary purge. Of course none of this necessarily precluded continued cooperation with the Soviet Union's former allies: official policy in the 1970s combined détente in inter-state relations with enhanced ideological struggle and a clamp-down on domestic dissidents. But in the aftermath of war the Soviet regime found it essential to lower the iron curtain again as quickly as possible, and at least convenient to generate an atmosphere of external threat. The process did not make dealing with the Russians any easier for foreigners; even during the war this had been hard enough, and it may be no

3. R.W. Pethybridge, *A History of Postwar Russia* (1966) pp.66–7; N. Tolstoy, *Stalin's Secret War* (1981) pp.266, 354

4. Pethybridge, *Postwar Russia* p. 70; *New York Times*, 10 Feb. 1946 p.30 (Stalin's speech); W.G. Hahn, *Postwar Soviet Politics* (1982) pp.21–3

accident that the people most pessimistic about Soviet intentions were men like Kennan and Harriman, who had had most experience of trying.

The war had left the USSR devastated. The human casualties were enormous – upwards of 20 million – though a hostile writer argues that at least half were self-inflicted.[5] It is not clear how deeply Stalin felt such things. But there can be no doubt as to the importance he set on economic recovery, the keynote of his February 1946 speech being the need to produce

> 50,000,000 tons of pig iron per year, 60,000,000 tons of steel, 500,000,000 tons of coal and 60,000,000 tons of oil.
>
> Only under such conditions will our country be insured against any eventuality. Perhaps three new Five-Year Plans will be required to achieve this, if not more. But it can be done and we must do it.

By his own standards he succeeded, taking 'national income' by 1950 to about 173 per cent of its 1940 level. Agriculture, however, had not quite recovered to prewar levels; 'real wages' reached 1928 levels only in 1952; and in 1953 agricultural production *per capita* was still well below that of 1913.[6]

The need for economic recovery might have pulled Soviet policy in a number of ways. One possible source of assistance was the United States. The USSR did show an interest in securing an American loan, though not at the price of making political concessions; it probably viewed US reluctance to lend as a hostile act. Lend-Lease was formally cut off at the end of the war; in fact the USSR received another $492 million over the next eighteen months from deliveries in the pipeline and UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) humanitarian aid,[7] but this was relatively small and uncertain. Much more dependable was the extraction of resources from areas under Soviet military control. Stalin saw no reason why the Red Army should not loot and generally compensate itself for its earlier sufferings, and there was a continuum between such individual enterprise and organised economic transfer. In the circumstances no very reliable figures can be produced; but the USSR may well have extracted from East Germany the $10 billion reparations for which it pressed so hard, as well as acquiring significant sums from the rest of

5. Tolstoy, *Stalin's Secret War* pp.280–4

6. *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Russia and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, 1982) p.335; R.A. Medvedev, *Let History Judge* (1972) p.486

7. G. Lundestad, *The American Non-Policy towards Eastern Europe 1943–1947* (Oslo, 1975) esp. pp.393, 395

Eastern Europe.[8] Similar processes were at work in the Far East, where the Red Army remained in Manchuria, despite US pressure, till it had removed some $860 million of industrial equipment,[9] then left.

This 'dismantling' was agreed to be the simplest way of collecting reparations. But it was often done in so hasty and haphazard a way that the equipment removed could never be fitted together again. Experience showed that it was more efficient to leave equipment in place and appropriate a share in the production. All along the Soviets had forced on the East European countries they had liberated unequal trade treaties and 'joint-stock' Soviet–local companies. The practice was soon extended to East Germany, and became so habitual that Stalin automatically sought to apply it to China after the communist victory there. At first there was little the host nations could do about it. But the urgent, generally overriding, pursuit of Soviet economic self-interest inevitably undermined the belief in the identity of interests between local communists and the USSR that Stalin had promoted so successfully in the 1930s; the Yugoslav Djilas records in his chapter on 'Disappointments' the peculiarly hard-nosed approach in 1948 of the Soviet Trade Minister Mikoyan, while Khrushchev comments on similar friction between Stalin and Mao.[10]

Politically there are two themes in the Soviet Union's immediately postwar development. One was Stalin's encouragement of competition between his subordinates, shifting his support whenever any of them seemed to be becoming too powerful. The other was that, in this process, it was almost invariably the hardest line that won. In 1946–7 Zhdanov re-established himself, at Malenkov's expense, as Stalin's second in command by stressing the revival of ideology in both party and cultural work. The year 1947 saw extensive debate between people looking to Russian and Soviet inspiration in science and philosophy and those who saw value in

8. J. Barber, *The Decision to Divide Germany* (Durham, NC, 1978) p.101 accepts the East German estimate of $4.3 billion reparations. But D.H. Aldcroft puts 'reparations, dismantlings, and occupation costs' from Eastern Europe as a whole at $14 billion – $19 billion, with two-thirds coming from East Germany (*The European Economy 1914–1980*, 1980 p.228); part of the discrepancy comes from the use of different prices and conversion rates. The USSR also gained $300 million reparations from Finland, plus the labour for many years of millions of prisoners and deportees

9. Replacement cost c.$2 billion: R.L. Garthoff (ed.) *Sino-Soviet Military Relations* (New York, 1966) p.74

10. M. Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (paperback edn, 1969) pp.129–30; N.S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers* i, tr. Strobe Talbot (paperback edn, 1971) pp. 426–7

Western experience and writings; with Stalin's personal support the scientist Lysenko established that there were distinct capitalist and socialist biologies. Zhdanov may have been slightly damaged by Lysenko's triumph, but his declining power was probably more due to alcoholism. Following his death in 1948 a coalition of Malenkov and the police chief Beria moved sharply to downgrade his supporters and, in 1949–50, take over his Leningrad power base through purges and executions (the so-called 'Leningrad affair'). Stalin seems to have become increasingly worried by Malenkov and Beria, whom he checked first by recalling Khrushchev to Moscow, then more directly by ousting Beria from the control of the police, downgrading his associates, and discovering a secessionist plot in Beria's own district of Georgia. This 'Mingrelian Affair' appears to have been the prelude to a major purge that began to unroll in 1953 when it was revealed that Jewish doctors had been systematically poisoning high Soviet leaders from Zhdanov onwards. Since Stalin fortunately died at this point we cannot tell how far matters would have gone. But he appears to have had two targets – unwanted political colleagues, and Jews in general. Stalin had always been anti-Semitic, but in his old age this trait became worse. He had not been pleased by his daughter's marriage to a Jew or by the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee's wartime suggestion that the Crimea become a Jewish Soviet Republic. The crucial turning-point may have been the tumultuous reception given in 1948 both publicly and privately to the first Israeli ambassador, Golda Meir, which showed much of the Jewish population to be alarmingly committed (and anxious to emigrate) to Israel. Executions, arrests and counter-propaganda followed immediately; 'Zionist conspiracy' became a count in purges in Eastern Europe; by 1953 the process was about to spread back to the Soviet Union.

DE-STALINISATION AND KHRUSHCHEV'S REFORMS 1953–64

Altogether Stalin left an unhappy society, and there was quite a wide measure of agreement among his successors as to what to do about it. The arrest and execution of top leaders was discontinued, at least after the elimination of Beria and his allies in 1953–4. The 'Gulag' prison labour camps, which may have contained between 10 million and 13 million people in 1953, were gradually wound down,

a process encouraged by large-scale prison revolts.[11] Khrushchev says that Beria first suggested doing so, but in such a way that he would control the process. Indeed much of politics revolved around control over the admission of past excesses and the rehabilitation of their victims: Khrushchev was the most successful practitioner, using Malenkov's involvement in the Leningrad affair to force him from the Chairmanship of the Council of Ministers in 1955, and proceeding next year to an exposure of Stalin's crimes in the 'Secret Speech' to the Twentieth Party Congress. The speech was acquired and published by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and had extensive repercussions abroad. Nevertheless Khrushchev remained attracted to 'de-Stalinisation', and reverted to it as a political weapon in the 1960s; this led him to sanction the publication of disturbing works like Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962), and such episodes did much to encourage 'dissident' writers on or beyond the fringes of the Communist Party.

Stalin's economic policy had been geared towards military strength, not welfare. It could be relaxed in two ways, by increasing agricultural production, and by tilting industry from defence and producer to consumer goods. Both Malenkov and Beria initially favoured the latter. Khrushchev affected not to, siding with the military and the 'steel-eaters' until he had obtained unchallenged supremacy in 1957. Then he moved against the army. Marshal Zhukov (who had afforded him valuable support against both Beria and the 1957 'Anti-Party Group') was now dismissed. Khrushchev embarked enthusiastically on a policy (parallel to that followed in the USA and UK at the same time) of relying on the nuclear deterrent and reducing the more expensive conventional forces; cuts of one-third were endorsed in 1960 and drew a round-robin of protest 'from the marshals of all military forces', which, together with growing international tension in 1961, induced him to desist. The Army was not the prime mover in his 1964 downfall, but it appears to have been sympathetic to the plotters.[12]

Khrushchev had always been an agricultural specialist; after

11. Most of the releases (perhaps 7 million–8 million) did not come until 1956–7. In 1977 leaked official figures gave a total of 1.7 million prisoners, 10,000 of them political (though some dissidents will also have been held on criminal charges or in psychiatric hospitals). This total probably fell; in 1986 Gorbachev began what had by late 1988 developed into a general release of political and religious prisoners: R.A. Medvedev and Z.A. Medvedev, *Khrushchev, the Years in Power* (Oxford, 1977) pp. 19–20; *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Russia* p. 391; *Keesing's*, 35470–3, 36490

12. R. Medvedev, *Khrushchev* (Oxford, 1982) pp.136–7, 183, 235; Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev, the Years in Power* p.150

Stalin's death he was constantly seeking new ways of remedying Soviet agricultural deficiencies. The most spectacular was his 'Virgin Lands Campaign' of 1954–6, the planting of 35 million hectares of steppe land in Central Asia; he was initially rewarded by good grain yields, but soil erosion has been a serious problem and, as the area is liable to drought, harvests fluctuate markedly. It was therefore only a partial solution, and so Khrushchev was always looking at others: the 1958 sale to collective farms of equipment previously held by machine tractor stations, the 1960s insistence on planting maize in all environments, the relocation of research institutes in the countryside, and the restoration to power of Lysenko. Many of these proved failures, some were unpopular: officials were upset by sudden banishment from the big cities, scientists infuriated by Lysenko's return after his post-Stalin eclipse. Politically the most damaging was the sudden decision in 1962 to split the Communist Party, at most levels, into agricultural and industrial sections, whose First Secretaries often found themselves competing instead of possessed of their traditional primacy over a distinct territorial area. It would be wrong to say that all this was to no avail – agricultural production rose considerably. But, with rising living standards, so did demand; indeed demand increased exponentially since greater affluence led to greater demand for meat, whose production now needed feed grain as an input. Probably none of this would have bothered Stalin, who had acquiesced in rural famine in 1932–3 and 1946. Khrushchev, however, began to import grain on a significant scale in 1963, and his successors went on doing so. Since the USA is the world's chief exporter, this has sometimes had political as well as economic consequences.

Agriculture provides a good illustration of Khrushchev's general style, which was still that of an early revolutionary militant. He perceived, often correctly, that something was wrong, but sought to cure it through simplistic crash programmes and institutional changes. His colleagues disliked these (and later termed them 'harebrained schemes'). They also disliked his growing tendency to concentrate power in his own hands, to take decisions without consultation, and to rely on a family and personal clientele.[13] More generally Khrushchev appears to have antagonised most politically important sectors of Soviet society. We have noted the Army; ideologically, Khrushchev's renewed attacks on Stalinism threatened to get out of hand; above all he had weakened the position of the

13. *Keesing's*, 20389–90; Medvedev, *Khrushchev* chap. 21

local Secretaries who preponderated in the party's Central Committee and had been his firm supporters in 1957, while his insistence that one-quarter to one-third of each party body be renewed at each election gave him the ability to shake up, reassign or drop the whole of the official class (towards which he is supposed to have felt a certain populist hostility).

BREZHNEV'S POLICIES OF STABILITY 1964–82

This view of Khrushchev's deficiencies seems to have dominated the Brezhnev era. The Central Committee meeting that confirmed Khrushchev's retirement in 1964 also resolved that the two chief offices, of First Secretary and of Chairman of the Council of Ministers, should not again be combined. As after Stalin's death, the principle of 'collective leadership' was emphasised, and Brezhnev's own emergence to pre-eminence was considerably slower than either Stalin's or Khrushchev's: in 1970 Nasser was appalled at the delays imposed by the Soviet leadership's mutual consultation on, and counter-signature of, even minor documents; and it was not until 1971 that messages to the US administration went out in Brezhnev's name rather than Kosygin's.[14] There is, too, some evidence that initially the collective leadership was distinctly weak. Both Suslov (in 1965 and perhaps 1969) and Shelepin (in 1965 and 1967) seem to have bid for power as rival hardliners; in 1968 Brezhnev managed to convince a leading Czech politician that if he had not intervened in Czechoslovakia he would have been toppled by a hardline Army-dominated coalition; and Marshal Grechko explained to Nasser in 1970 that he could now be more assertive since the civilians had been unable to manage the Czechs and had had to get him to do so.[15] Even when Brezhnev became clearly predominant in the 1970s, he preferred to cultivate and coopt, rather than dictate to, the great bureaucratic interests, a process symbolised by the 1973 elevation to the Politburo of Andropov of the KGB,

14. M. Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan* (1975) p.96; Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (1979) (hereafter *Memoirs* i) p.527

15. Z. Medvedev, *Andropov* (Oxford, 1983) pp.49–57; A. Brown and M. Kaser (eds), *The Soviet Union since the Fall of Khrushchev* (1978 edn) pp.251–2; J. Radvanyi, *Delusion and Reality* (South Bend, Ind., 1978) pp.232–6; Z. Mlynar, *Night Frost in Prague* (1980) pp.158–68; 'Lord Trevelyan recalls Gamal Abdul Nasser', *The [London] Times Saturday Review*, 19 Feb. 1977 p.33

Grechko the Defence Minister, and the long-standing diplomat and Foreign Minister, Gromyko.

This conciliation of established interests appears to have had a number of implications for foreign policy. The clearest is that the USSR embarked in the Brezhnev years on a prolonged military build-up. Some increase in defence spending was no doubt inevitable: in the USA, too, Eisenhower's policy of concentrating on cheap nuclear airpower was abandoned by Kennedy; and the USSR had a further stimulus in its humiliation over the Cuban missile crisis. But the sustained scale of the increase was to puzzle Western observers, and may be due largely to the revived power of a 'military-industrial complex'. The build-up proved important, both for its effect on Western opinion, and because it provided the USSR – arguably for the first time in history – with the means of projecting power at a considerable distance from its homeland. Stalin could intervene in Eastern Europe and Manchuria, but not in most of the Third World; in 1975–6 Soviet airlifts enabled Cuban troops to install a government in Angola, and in 1977–8 to repel a Somali invasion and rescue the Ethiopian revolution.

Another aspect of Brezhnev's conciliation of interests was his cautious middle-of-the-road domestic policy. This had many dimensions. Khrushchev's persecution of the Orthodox Church was called off. Minimum wages were raised, and the condition of peasants (unaccountably neglected by Khrushchev in his later years) was much improved; in 1974 they were even accorded passports permitting internal travel. Prices remained fairly effectively frozen. This must have provided reassurance against a recurrence of the 1962 strikes (and shootings) and against any replication in the USSR of the far more serious Polish disturbances in and after 1970; it also seems to have confined 'dissent' to the intelligentsia as opposed to the workers. But it had an economic cost: rising wages and stable prices increased demand at a rate faster than the rigid economic and distributional system could cope with; the result was rationing by shortages rather than by 'market-clearing' prices.

One possible response to such problems is economic reform; in the 1960s economic reforms, some quite far-reaching, were carried out in most East European countries. They were debated in the Soviet Union too, but the reforms that Kosygin introduced in 1965 were markedly more cautious. Even they were not fully carried through, with events in Czechoslovakia convincing the Soviet leadership that there could all too easily be a link between economic reform and the loss of political control; the lesson was

reinforced in 1970 when price increases generated riots that led to the fall of the Polish leader Gomulka.

Another possible remedy, one that bypassed the risks inherent in changing the system of economic management, was the easing of bottlenecks and the acquisition of technology through imports. This process began in the 1960s with grain imports and the construction by Fiat of a major car factory. Its high point came with the flowering of détente, a policy particularly linked with Brezhnev, in the early 1970s. But there were disappointments: the United States would concede 'most favoured nation' tariff status only on politically unacceptable terms; and the Soviet economic system did not always find it easy to assimilate, let alone update, imported technology. Still the 1970s were marked by a sharp rise in the prices of the USSR's chief exports, oil and gold; this, plus appreciable borrowing, greatly expanded its capacity to purchase abroad.

If the alleviation of internal difficulties was one aim of détente, détente nevertheless cut across another of Brezhnev's policies, the curbing of political and cultural dissidence that had been uncorked by Khrushchev's later attacks on Stalin. The dissidents sought Western support and addressed themselves as much to a Western as to a Soviet audience. Here as elsewhere Brezhnev followed the middle of the road: in 1965 Shelepin pushed for a crackdown and the KGB urged the arrest of a thousand Moscow intellectuals;[16] the leadership settled on show trials for two, Sinyavsky and Daniel. This was probably not enough, and may even have proved counter-productive: the dissident network and its journal, *The Chronicle of Current Events*, reached its peak in the later 1960s. Further arrests and dismissals followed, but it was from 1973 onwards that repression became markedly more severe, notwithstanding the potentially embarrassing 'human rights basket' of the 1975 Helsinki Agreements that – in other respects – represented a major achievement of Brezhnev's détente policy. In 1980 the previously untouchable Academician Sakharov was assigned to compulsory residence in Gorki (in response to his protest against the Afghanistan intervention), while the Olympic Games provided an occasion for the deportation from Moscow of many other dissidents.

The most obvious link between internal dissent and external relations lay through the repudiation of the Soviet Union by many Jews and their desire to emigrate to either Israel or the USA. This

16. Brown and Kaser, *The Soviet Union since Khrushchev* pp. 251–2

desire was not new, but it appears to have been reactivated by the combination of renewed anti-Semitism after the 1967 Arab–Israeli War and of the advent of détente. Jewish emigration rose from 400 in 1968 to 35,000 in 1973. This may have owed something to pressure from the Nixon administration, but such pressure was transmitted in private; publicly Nixon was vulnerable to charges of disinterest in the fate of dissidents, especially given the increase in Soviet internal repression that we have already noted. Congressmen like Senator Jackson attempted, with encouragement from Sakharov and at first successfully, to do better by linking trade concessions to further Soviet liberalisation of emigration. In 1974 this backfired: amendments to the Trade Act made the Soviet acquisition of 'most favoured nation' status precarious and established a congressional veto over most official loans to the USSR; this led the Soviet Union to withdraw from its 1972 trade agreement with the USA – and to cut emigration.[17] Human rights in the USSR, détente and 'congressional oversight' had fused together as issues in *American* domestic politics. Matters were then taken a step further with the advent of President Carter, who sought in 1977 to distance himself from Kissinger's geopolitics and to emphasise his nation's 'old dream' of human liberty. Carter's human rights policy was not simply anti-Soviet: it applied to, and irritated, friendly Latin American regimes; nor was such ideological competition incompatible with the official Soviet definition of détente. But the USSR did not take kindly to actions that Brezhnev termed 'direct interference in our internal affairs'.[18] This distaste was reinforced by Carter's initial handling of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. The Soviet leadership seems to have taken a very low view both of Carter personally and of his ability to deliver congressional ratification of any agreement. Accordingly it showed no disposition in 1979 to heed his warnings not to intervene in Afghanistan.

When Brezhnev died in 1982 East–West relations were at a low ebb. Given Brezhnev's personal association with policies of détente, this must represent something of a political failure. In other respects he had, by his own standards, been not unsuccessful, for he had kept the Soviet system running without the horrors of Stalin or the often counter-productive upheavals of the Khrushchev era.

17. Kissinger, *Memoirs* ii pp.249–55, 985–98; *Keesing's*, 26850–1, 26993–5. Similar Congressional pressure had led in 1911 to the abrogation of a commercial treaty with *tsarist* Russia in retaliation for its treatment of Jews – and to a worsening of that treatment

18. *Keesing's*, 28773 ff

Soviet military power and global reach had grown impressively. If the Soviet people did not in 1980 have the highest living standard in the world (as Khrushchev had promised in 1961), per capita consumption had roughly tripled since 1950.[19]

CORRUPTION, STAGNATION AND ATTEMPTS AT REFORM

The Brezhnev regime, however, is now portrayed not as a period of success, but rather as the 'era of stagnation', symbolised by the collapse of Brezhnev's own health and intellect after his strokes of 1975 and 1978. In his last years there came into the open two problems that have had an enormous influence on subsequent political developments, corruption and economic slowdown. Corruption certainly did not start with Brezhnev, but his policy of allowing the official classes security of tenure left them more scope to exploit their positions for personal gain. Brezhnev's own family and associates were guilty; in 1982 the former KGB chief, Yuri Andropov, was able to turn this to political advantage, driving some to suicide and arresting others in a series of bizarre scandals.[20]

More seriously,

> The country began [more especially in the later 1970s] to lose momentum. Economic failures became more frequent. Difficulties began to accumulate . . . and unresolved problems to multiply.
> . . . [Since 1972] the national income growth rates had declined by half and by the beginning of the eighties had fallen to a level close to economic stagnation. A country that was once quickly closing on the world's most advanced nations began to lose one position after another. Moreover, the gap in the efficiency of production, quality of products, scientific and technological development, . . . and the use of advanced techniques began to widen, and not to our advantage.[21]

Figures are disputed, but there is general agreement as to the phenomenon. The leadership was not prepared to cut expenditure accordingly; and it would seem that the proportion of the budget covered by printing money rose from 20 per cent in 1970 to 30 per cent in 1982. This in turn led to a situation in which people had

19. Paul Dibb, *The Soviet Union: The Incomplete Superpower* (Basingstoke, 1988 edn) pp.70–1
20. Medvedev, *Andropov* chap. 9
21. Gorbachev, *Perestroika* pp.18–19

more money than there were goods to purchase. Since official prices did not rise accordingly, this meant that goods were snapped up as soon as they appeared in the shops (rationing by queuing or shortages), or that they were diverted from official to more remunerative black or private markets (corruption). Brezhnev's successors were ready (on their appointments) to admit that things were wrong: Andropov observed that there were 'many problems in the economy' and that he had 'no ready recipes to solve them', Chernenko that 'The system of our economic management, the whole of our economic machinery needs to be seriously restructured'.[22]

This was more easily said than done. Andropov, the ex-KGB chief, is said to have had his liberal side, but seems to have relied chiefly on the punishment of corrupt, and retirement of incompetent, officials, combined with a crack-down on 'moonlighting' and a general tightening of labour discipline (including the round-up of people queuing or patronising the public baths, to see if they were skiving off work). Within a little over a year he was dead. Brezhnev had not wanted Andropov to succeed him, and had almost managed to pass the General Secretaryship on to his right-hand man Chernenko. On Andropov's death in 1984, Chernenko took over. This might have led to a return to Brezhnevite ways, but Chernenko, too, was gravely ill, and died in March 1985. Again the succession had been contested; in the event the Politburo chose the young and energetic Gorbachev. He had been Andropov's protégé, and would clearly resume the attempt to shake the system up. Few, however, can have expected him to act as vigorously as he did, or with such extraordinary consequences.[23]

GORBACHEV'S FIRST FIVE YEARS 1985–90

It is too early to reach a balanced judgement on his rule; one can perhaps describe its effects by adapting a celebrated political joke of the Brezhnev era. This likened the USSR to a train proceeding

22. Dibb, *The Incomplete Superpower* chap. 3; Judy Shelton, *The Coming Soviet Crash* (New York, 1989) chaps 1, 2
23. N.A.D. Macrae, *The 2024 Report: A Concise History of the Future, 1974–2024* (1984) had already forecast that economic problems would bring to the USSR Liberal political reconstruction, the shedding of its peripheral nationalities, and close cooperation with the USA in the management of international relations