October and Perestroika

THERE HAS BEEN a continuing debate over when reform actually began in our country. Politicians and journalists have been trying to locate the exact point at which all our dramatic changes began. Some assert that reforms in Russia did not really begin until 1992.

The basis for reform was laid by Khrushchev. His break with the repressive policies of Stalinism was a heroic feat of civic action. Khrushchev also tried, though without much success, to make changes in the economy. Significant attempts were made within the framework of the so-called Kosygin reforms. Then came a long period of stagnation and a new attempt by Yuri Andropov to improve the situation in our society. An obvious sign that the times were ripe for change was the activity of the dissidents. They were suppressed and expelled from the country, but their moral stand and their proposals for change (for example, the ideas of Andrei Sakharov) played a considerable role in creating the spiritual preconditions for perestroika.

Of course external factors were also important. Thus the Prague Spring of 1968 sowed the seeds of profound thought and reflection in our society. The invasion of Czechoslovakia, dictated by fear of the "democratic infection," was not only a crude violation of the sovereignty and rights of the Czechoslovak people. It had the effect, for years, of putting the brakes on moves toward change, although change was long overdue both in our country and throughout the so-called socialist camp. I should also acknowledge the role of such phenomena as Willy Brandt's "Eastern policy" and the search for new avenues toward social progress by those who were called Euro-Communists. All this contributed to deeper reflection in our country, reflection on the values of democracy, freedom, and peace and the ways to achieve them.

Thus we see that attempts at change were made, quite a few of them in fact. But none of them produced results. This is not surprising: After all, none of these attempts touched the essence of the system—property relations, the power structure, and the monopoly of the party on political and intellectual life. The suppression of dissidence continued in spite of everything.

Clearly what was needed was not particular measures in a certain area, even if they were substantial, but rather an entirely different policy, a new political path. Since early 1985, especially after the April plenum of the CPSU Central Committee, this kind of policy began to be formulated. A new course was taken.

Today, in retrospect, one can only be amazed at how quickly and actively our people, the citizens of our country, supported that new course. Apathy and indifference toward public life were overcome. This convinced us that change was vitally necessary. Society awakened.

Perestroika was born out of the realization that problems of internal development in our country were ripe, even overripe, for a solution. New approaches and types of action were needed to escape the downward spiral of crisis, to normalize life, and to make a breakthrough to qualitatively new frontiers. It can be said that to a certain extent perestroika was a result of a rethinking of the Soviet experience since October.

The vital need for change was dictated also by the following consideration. It was obvious that the whole world was entering a new stage of development—some call it the postindustrial age, some the information age. But the Soviet Union had not yet passed through the industrial stage. It was lagging further and further behind those processes that were making a renewal in the life of the world community possible. Not only was a leap forward in technology needed but fundamental change in the entire social and political process.

Of course it cannot be said that at the time we began perestroika we had everything thought out. In the early stages we all said, including myself, that perestroika was a continuation of the October revolution. Today I believe that that assertion contained a grain of truth but also an element of delusion.

The truth was that we were trying to carry out fundamental ideas that had been advanced by the October revolution but had not been realized: overcoming people's alienation from government and property, giving power to the people (and taking it away from the bureaucratic upper echelons), implanting democracy, and establishing true social justice.

The delusion was that at the time I, like most of us, assumed this could be accomplished by improving and refining the existing system. But as experience accumulated, it became clear that the crisis that had paralyzed the country in the late 1970s and early 1980s was systemic and not the result of isolated aberrations. The logic of how matters developed pointed to the need to penetrate the system to its very foundations and change it, not merely refine or perfect it. We were already talking about a gradual shift to a social market economy, to a democratic political system based on rule of law and the full guarantee of human rights.

This transition turned out to be extremely difficult and complicated, more complicated than it had seemed to us at first. Above all, this was because the totalitarian system possessed tremendous inertia. There was resistance from the party and government structures that constituted the solid internal framework of that system. The nomenklatura encouraged resistance. And this is understandable: Since it held the entire country in its hands, it would have to give up its unlimited power and privileges. Thus the entire perestroika era was filled with struggles—concealed at first and then more open, more fully exposed to public view—between the forces for change and those who opposed it, those who, especially after the first two years, simply began to sabotage change.

The complexity of the struggle stemmed from the fact that in 1985 the entire society—politically, ideologically, and spiritually—was still in the thrall of old customs and traditions. Great effort was required to overcome these traditions, as mentioned above. There was another factor. Destroying the old system would have been senseless if we did not simultaneously lay the foundations for a new life. And this was genuinely unexplored territory. The six-year perestroika era was a time filled with searching and discovery, gains and losses, breakthroughs in thought and action, as well as mistakes and oversights. The attempted coup in August 1991 interrupted perestroika. After that there were many developments, but they were along different lines, following different intentions. Still, in the relatively short span of six years we succeeded in doing a great deal. The reforms in China, incidentally, have been going on since 1974, and their most difficult problems still remain unsolved.

What specifically did we accomplish as a result of the stormy years of perestroika? The foundations of the totalitarian system were eliminated. Profound democratic changes were begun. Free general elections were held for the first time, allowing real choice. Freedom of the press and a multi-

party system were guaranteed. Representative bodies of government were established, and the first steps toward a separation of powers were taken. Human rights (previously in our country these were only "so-called," reference to them invariably made only in scornful quotation marks) now became an unassailable principle. And freedom of conscience was also established.

Movement began toward a multistructured, or mixed, economy providing equality of rights among all forms of property. Economic freedom was made into law. The spirit of enterprise began to gain strength, and processes of privatization and the formation of joint stock companies got under way. Within the framework of our new land law, the peasantry was reborn and private farmers made their appearance. Millions of hectares of land were turned over to both rural and urban inhabitants. The first privately owned banks also came on the scene. The different nationalities and peoples were given the freedom to choose their own course of development. Searching for a democratic way to reform our multinational state, to transform it from a unitary state in practice into a national federation, we reached the threshold at which a new union treaty was to be signed, based on the recognition of the sovereignty of each republic along with the preservation of a common economic, social, and legal space that was necessary for all, including a common defense establishment.

The changes within our country inevitably led to a shift in foreign policy. The new course of perestroika predetermined renunciation of stereotypes and the confrontational methods of the past. It allowed for a rethinking of the main parameters of state security and the ways to ensure it. I will return to this subject.

In other words, the foundations were laid for normal, democratic, and peaceful development of our country and its transformation into a normal member of the world community.

These are the decisive results of perestroika. Today, however, looking back through the prism of the past few years and taking into account the general trends of world development today, it seems insufficient to register these as the only results. Today it is evidently of special interest to state not only *what* was done but also *how* and *why* perestroika was able to achieve its results, and what its mistakes and miscalculations were.

Above all, *perestroika would have been simply impossible if there had not been a profound and critical reexamination not only of the problems confronting our country but a rethinking of all realities—both national and international.*

Previous conceptions of the world and its developmental trends and, correspondingly, of our country's place and role in the world were based, as we have said, on dogmas deeply rooted in our ideology, which essentially did not permit us to pursue a realistic policy. These conceptions had to be shattered and fundamentally new views worked out regarding our country's development and the surrounding world.

This task turned out to be far from simple. We had to renounce beliefs that for decades had been considered irrefutable truths, to reexamine the very methods and principles of leadership and action, indeed to rethink our surroundings entirely on a scientific basis (and not according to schemes inherited from ideological biases).

The product of this effort was the new thinking, which became the basis for all policy—both foreign and domestic—during perestroika. The point of departure for the new thinking was an attempt to evaluate everything not from the viewpoint of narrow class interests or even national interests but from the broader perspective: that of giving priority to the interests of all humanity with consideration for the increasingly apparent wholeness of the world, the interdependence of all countries and peoples, the humanist values formed over centuries.

The practical work of perestroika was to *renounce stereotypical ideological thinking and the dogmas of the past. This required a fresh view of the world and of ourselves with no preconceptions, taking into account the challenges of the present and the already evident trends of the future in the third millennium*.

During perestroika, and often now as well, the initiators of perestroika have been criticized for the absence of a "clear plan" for change. The habit developed over decades of having an all-inclusive regimentation of life. But the events of the perestroika years and of the subsequent period have plainly demonstrated the following: *At times of profound, fundamental change in the foundations of social development it is not only senseless but impossible to expect some sort of previously worked out "model" or a clear-cut outline of the transformations that will take place. This does not mean, however, the absence of a definite goal for the reforms, a distinct conception of their content and the main direction of their development*.

All this was present in perestroika: a profound democratization of public life and a guarantee of freedom of social and political choice. These goals were proclaimed and frequently reaffirmed. This did not exclude but presupposed the necessity to change one's specific reference points at each stage as matters proceeded and to engage in a constant search for optimal solutions.

An extremely important conclusion follows from the experience of perestroika: Even in a society formed under totalitarian conditions, democratic change is possible by *peaceful evolutionary means*. The problem of revolution and evolution, of the role and place of reforms in social development, is one of the eternal problems of history. In its inner content perestroika of course was a revolution. But in its form it was an evolutionary process, a process of reform.

Historically the USSR had grown ripe for a profound restructuring much earlier than the mid-1980s. But if we had not decided to begin this restructuring at the time we did, even though we were quite late in doing so, an explosion would have taken place in the USSR, one of tremendous destructive force. It would certainly have been called a revolution, but it would have been the catastrophic result of irresponsible leadership.

In the course of implementing change we did not succeed in avoiding bloodshed altogether. But that was a consequence solely of resistance by the opponents of perestroika in the upper echelons of the nomenklatura. On the whole the change from one system to another took place peacefully and by evolutionary means. Our having chosen a policy course that was supported from below by the masses made this peaceful transition possible. And our policy of glasnost played a decisive role in mobilizing the masses and winning their support.

Radical reforms in the context of the Soviet Union could only have been initiated from above by the leadership of the party and the country. This was predetermined by the very "nature" of the system—supercentralized management of all public life. This can also be explained by the inert condition of the masses, who had become used to carrying out orders and decisions handed down from above.

From the very beginning of the changes our country's leadership assigned primary importance to open communication with the people, including direct disclosure in order to explain the new course. Without the citizens' understanding and support, without their participation, it would not have been possible to move from dead center. That is why we initiated the policies of perestroika and glasnost simultaneously.

Like perestroika itself, glasnost made its way with considerable difficulty. The nomenklatura on all levels, which regarded the strictest secrecy and protection of authorities from criticism from below as the holy of holies of the regime, opposed glasnost in every way they could, both openly and secretly, trampling its first shoots in the local press. Even among the most

sincere supporters of perestroika, the tradition over many years of making everything a secret made itself felt. But it was precisely glasnost that awakened people from their social slumber, helped them overcome indifference and passivity and become aware of the stake they had in change and of its important implications for their lives. Glasnost helped us to explain and promote awareness of the new realities and the essence of our new political course. In short, without glasnost there would have been no perestroika.

The question of the relation between ends and means is one of the key aspects of politics and of political activity. If the means do not correspond to the ends, or, still worse, if the means contradict the ends, this will lead to setbacks and failure. The Soviet Union's experience is convincing evidence of this. When we began perestroika as a process of democratic change, we had to ensure that the means used to carry out these changes were also democratic.

In essence, glasnost became the means for drawing people into political activity, for including them in the creation of a new life, and this, above all, corresponded to the essence of perestroika. Glasnost not only created conditions for implementing the intended reforms but also made it possible to overcome attempts to sabotage the policy of change.

We are indebted to glasnost for a profound psychological transformation in the public consciousness toward democracy, freedom, and the humanist values of civilization. Incidentally, this was one of the guarantees that the fundamental gains of this period would be irreversible.

Perestroika confirmed once again that the normal, democratic development of society rules out universal secrecy as a method of administration. Democratic development presupposes glasnost—that is, openness, freedom of information for all citizens and freedom of expression by them of their political, religious, and other views and convictions, freedom of criticism in the fullest sense of the word.

Why, then, did perestroika not succeed in achieving all its goals? The answer primarily involves the question of "harmonization" between political and economic change.

The dominant democratic aspect of perestroika meant that the accent was inevitably placed on political reform. The dialectic of our development during those years was such that serious changes in the economic sphere proved to be impossible without emancipating society politically, without ensuring freedom—that is, breaking the political structures of totalitarianism. And this was accomplished. But economic change lagged behind political change, and we did not succeed in developing economic change to the full extent.

In recent years I have often had occasion to refute criticism to the effect that we should have begun with economic changes and held tightly to the political reins, as was done in China. There was no lack of understanding of economics on our part, still less scorn or disregard for it. To dispute that line of criticism it is sufficient to examine the chronology of events of perestroika. From the very beginning most plenary sessions of our Central Committee were devoted precisely to restructuring the economy. This aspect of the process occupied nearly three-quarters of my time and effort as general secretary, as well as the work of my colleagues and our government agencies. However, the state monopoly ownership that prevailed in our economy for decades, the administrative-command system that had left its mark on our economic personnel and party leaders, most of whom had been trained in economic management, indeed the very character of our economic system which had been functioning over such a prolonged period—all these factors contributed to *incredibly powerful inertia*, which made the task of switching over onto new tracks, the tracks of a real market economy, tremendously difficult. Even if all our economic ideas and decisions during perestroika had been flawless (and I cannot say they were), that inertia would have been present.

Change had begun, but we were searching for an optimal way of making a peaceful transition from a totalitarian economy to a democratic one. The search was long and drawn out. Moods of disillusionment and disappointment, loss of faith in perestroika, dissatisfaction with the worsening material situation—all these forces began to rise among the people (although the material conditions at that time cannot be compared to those that resulted from the "shock therapy" of Gaidar and Yeltsin). Support for the reforms in our society grew distinctly weaker, and populist demagogues took advantage of this, promising to correct matters in the course of one year, which was sheer balderdash. But people wanted a quick change for the better. The society's dissatisfaction over market conditions was thoroughly exploited by the opponents of reform inside the CPSU.

Another factor that threatened perestroika was the delay in solving the nationalities question, transforming the USSR from an actual unitary state to a truly multinational federation and thus, in the last analysis, bringing the situation into correspondence with the relevant clauses of the Soviet constitution. Nationalist elements and the ruling circles in the [non-Russian] republics, deciding that the moment had come to weaken control from the center, took advantage of this.

The negative processes began to gain strength after Yeltsin's group came to power in Russia and issued a declaration of sovereignty for the Russian Federation. The intention behind this was in fact to eliminate the union of republics (although nothing was said about that at the time). They were able to counter that destructive policy line with the line of preserving the union and reforming it fundamentally. By July 1991 the various republics had agreed on a new union treaty. The attempted coup by the opponents of reform thwarted the signing of that treaty. And although those opponents were defeated, the events of August 1991 gave a powerful impetus to the processes of disintegration, and the position of the central government of the Soviet Union was greatly undermined. The leadership of the Russian Republic took advantage of this. It had already been attempting constantly to assume the right to make decisions that would affect the entire union. Thus the process of estrangement and disunification among the republics was intensified, and all this resulted, in December 1991, in an agreement between Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus to dissolve the USSR.

These are some of the lessons of perestroika. Of course I have only indicated the most important and fundamental ones. These lessons, it would seem, have a definite importance not only for historians. Today when the entire world is in flux, when the need for change has arisen in many countries as a result of the many new challenges of the approaching new century, any experience of change and reform takes on a significance that is not limited by national borders.

I can say this without fear of error: The experience of the transition from totalitarianism to democracy in my country, for all its uniqueness, contains much that may be of interest to democratic reformers in other countries. Especially if we keep in mind the intensified tendency toward decentralization and the rising new wave of nationalism. What about for Russia itself? What might be useful for its further development? The continuing crisis in Russia is explained in many respects by the fact that it departed from the evolutionary road of reforms and yielded to the influence of the proponents of "shock therapy." It retreated from genuinely democratic standards in public life, scorned the social imperative, and failed to resolve the question of establishing proper federated relationships. We can be sure that the future of Russia as a democratic, peace-loving, humane country can be assured only if it continues to move along the path of genuinely democratic renewal, which was begun by perestroika—of course taking into account in the process all the new elements that have emerged.

In concluding this chapter let us once again recall October. The revolution of 1917 was victorious under the banner of ultrademocratic slogans. These slogans were not merely demagogic, not just a means of winning power. They expressed a profound basis for the transformation of our country, a country that used to be called the Russian empire. However, the Bolsheviks, and after them Stalin, demonstrated to their country and to the world in the most convincing way that democracy cannot be built on principles of hatred, hostility, or elimination of one part of society, or of the world, by another. Today in Russia, in the final analysis, we have come to understand democracy as a universal human value, and the task we face is not to end up once again in the position of serving as a "negative model."

Thoughts about perestroika naturally encompass the entire complex of problems of the new thinking, including, in foreign policy, the international aspect. The road to a new foreign policy was a long one.

The first decree adopted after the October Revolution was the decree on peace. It proposed an immediate end to World War I on all fronts—but it did not call for a separate peace, as was sometimes claimed in later literature. The Entente countries rejected this appeal. Only then did Russia leave the war separately, concluding the Brest-Litovsk Treaty with Germany. This was a humiliating treaty, a treaty of servitude. But it released our tortured and exhausted country from the worldwide slaughter. And at the same time it served as a stimulus toward ending the war as a whole. The effect of the peaceful signal Russia had given was felt everywhere in the world, by the masses of soldiers in combat and by the populations of the warring countries. Its impact was enormous, and for the Entente rulers this made Russia a more dangerous and hated enemy than even Germany itself. They were forced to draw other conclusions as well, however, from what had happened in Russia.

President Woodrow Wilson noted that the Bolsheviks had successfully influenced world public opinion by their use of a most effective weapon—a policy of peace. If the U.S. were to counter that influence successfully, it would have to seize that weapon from them. There soon appeared Wilson's famous Fourteen Points—the American program for peace, which definitely reflected and took into account the peaceful challenge made by October and its impact on the world.

Soviet foreign policy after October was not irreproachable from the point of view of consistency in pursuing a peaceable line in the international

arena. If nothing else, the attempts to implement the idea of world revolution, the activities of the Communist International, directed from Moscow, were sufficient to make the West distrust the peace initiatives of the USSR. But actually, from 1922 on, Soviet Russia and the Soviet Union were not inclined to initiate or engage in wars. Peaceful relations with the West, and mutually advantageous, businesslike economic ties [with the West], became a question of self-preservation for Russia.

The activities of Soviet diplomats in the 1930s, in the context of the overall democratic movement against fascism and war, are well known. This policy was dictated by the needs of the Soviet people, although the Kremlin had its own hidden agenda in this process. I believe that Stalin made a gross error in the rapprochement with Germany in 1939, an error that cost our country and the world dearly. However, the so-called Western democracies, which at the time were operating in the spirit of the Munich agreement, committed an error of no less significance.

It was natural for the USSR to join the anti-Hitler coalition with those who might have seemed to be its irreconcilable ideological opponents. This alliance was the determining factor for victory in a war that affected the destinies of all humanity. If this alliance had been maintained after the war, in a different form of course, the peace toward which we are now moving just at the end of the century could have been ours much earlier. But the former allies rushed headlong into the Cold War. Each side bears its share of responsibility for this. Which side bears the greater responsibility is a question that has not yet been answered by honest, objective historians in a sufficiently convincing way.

We cannot say that the Soviet Union's entire postwar foreign policy brought only harm to our country and had nothing positive to offer to the outside world. It is enough to recall the ideas of the Twentieth Party Congress and some of Khrushchev's specific actions, as well as the policy of détente under Brezhnev and the attempt to limit the nuclear arms race. The flaw in Soviet foreign policy, however, consisted in the fact that all its energy came from an ideological source. A hard core of ideological constructs ultimately determined the behavior of the USSR on decisive questions of international relations and nourished an atmosphere of confrontation toward the West, which was of course also partly a response to the no less confrontational policy pursued by the West toward the Soviet Union. In thinking about these problems at length, I have come to the conclusion that the pol-

icy pursued by both sides was dictated by mutual fear and was ideologically driven. As a result, by the mid-1980s the world was approaching a boundary line beyond which there loomed a universal nuclear catastrophe.

In beginning perestroika, we understood that if nothing was changed in our country's foreign policy, we would get nowhere with the internal changes we had in mind. An analysis of the world situation and our country's place in it had begun even before 1985. With the start of perestroika the work in this area moved forward energetically, and it was no longer kept secret but proceeded in full view of the broadest public. What was being discussed? We sought to define in a new way the true national interests of our country, the real parameters and imperatives for national security. We strove to examine soberly the condition of the world community and the main trends in world development. And on this basis, we tried to work out a well-considered program of specific actions in the main areas of foreign policy.

We understood of course that everything did not depend on us: Confrontational thinking and a combative political "culture" were characteristic phenomena on both sides of the Iron Curtain. But we realized that a great deal depended on us. During the years of discord with the West we in the USSR, with our nuclear arsenal and by some of our actions, had inspired distrust not only in official circles but among the broader public. Therefore it was necessary first to change our behavior in practical terms in our relations with other governments. The decisive element was to devise foreign policy conceptions that would be new in principle, to develop fresh criteria and principles for all Soviet policy in the international arena. As described above, the fruit of this effort was the new thinking—a philosophy and methodology of new approaches toward world affairs.

The new thinking was not developed all at once. It was enriched and refined as changes took place in our world outlook; it was checked and verified through our experiences in dealing and communicating with the outside world. All this, as well as the results of our changed policies, will be discussed in greater detail in part 3 of this book.