

Ultimately, it can be argued, it was this popular determination to resist Nazi aggression and brutality that was the decisive element in Soviet victory. The government wisely associated itself with and encouraged this. Official propaganda during the war was filled with true tales of heroism, courage, and sacrifice. One can argue that, as the Nazi onslaught advanced, the Soviet Union became more united than ever before. What united Soviets behind the war efforts however, was not class struggle or world revolution but nation, home, and family. The Communist government consciously utilized the prestige of Russian military heroes of the past and the manifold attractions of nationalism. Wartime speeches, journalism, political posters, and literature all emphasized the inhuman brutalities of the enemy and the need to defend the nation (vaguely defined as both Soviet and Russian) and the lives of one's wife and children. The government also took practical measures to strengthen popular support of the war effort, such as making concessions to the practice of religion and giving collective farmers more freedom to market products grown on private plots. And there were implied promises of further changes in political and social relations. The government spoke of a new and better life that would follow the end of the war. In other words, the war helped the Soviet regime create a new patriotic political culture. The significance of this went beyond the war: This new solidarity born of suffering and struggle would help bolster the legitimacy and even popularity of the Soviet regime more than any other event in Soviet history. It is not surprising, therefore, that remembrance of the "Great Patriotic War" would remain a permanent part of Soviet culture and that it would become a key element in post-Soviet nostalgia. But mobilization of popular support to free the Soviet Union from the Nazi threat carried with it political risks. As we shall see, disappointment with expectations that the regime had changed during the war, and that people would be rewarded for their sacrifices, would feed new discontent.

CHAPTER 39



Stalin's Last Decade, 1945–53

Stalin! No name is nearer or dearer to millions of people—the builders of Communism.

Stalin! No name is more respected and esteemed by the laboring millions in the People's Democracies, liberated from fascist fetters by the valiant Soviet Army and now happily laying the foundations of Socialism.

Stalin! The eyes of all the common men and women the world over, of all those who cherish freedom and true democracy, of all those who hate war and dream of durable and lasting peace, are now turning to him with hope.

BORIS POLEVOI, 1950

We demand that our comrades, both as leaders in literary affairs and as writers, be guided by the vital force of the Soviet order—its politics. Only thus can our youth be reared, not in a devil-may-care attitude and a spirit of ideological indifference, but in a strong and vigorous revolutionary spirit

ANDREI ZHDANOV

The matches were ready to burn with shame for the factory that produced them, but they couldn't.

THE SATIRICAL MAGAZINE KROKODIL

The Second World War brought tremendous human losses and material destruction to the Soviet Union. In addition to the millions of soldiers who died, millions of civilians perished in the shifting battle zone and in German-occupied territory. Scholars continue to debate the numbers who perished due to the war. The most recent calculations, based on newly available archival material and demographic research, estimate approximately 25 million war dead, with more civilian than military deaths. Soviet citizens died, often under horrific conditions, as slave laborers in Germany, as prisoners of war,

and in Nazi concentration camps. Partisan warfare led to horrible reprisals against the population. In contrast to the First World War, most atrocity stories of the Second World War were true. Because Hitler's war in the East was one of annexation and extermination—in large part the work of the notorious *Einsatzgruppen*—mass shootings and mass deportations to death camps were common. While the general Nazi goal of depopulating Ukraine and Russia encouraged murderous brutality, particular groups were targeted for complete annihilation, especially Jews, Roma (gypsies), and Communists. To the dead may be added perhaps another 20 million for the children that were not born in the decade of the 1940s. Complicating efforts to count the war dead, scholars have noted that conditions in Stalin's labor camps also contributed to higher than normal mortality rates, though it is also argued that most deaths in the Gulag were due to conditions created by the war. Of those alive at the start of the war, nearly one in five were dead at its end. Many of the survivors were physically crippled and emotionally scarred. All told, the war was a time of catastrophic human loss.

Material losses were similarly enormous. In addition to the destruction suffered in the fighting, huge areas of the country were devastated—frequently more than once—at the hands of the retreating Red Army or the withdrawing Germans. The Red Army followed the scorched-earth policy, trying to destroy all that could be of military value to the enemy. The Nazis, when they were forced to abandon Soviet territory, attempted to demolish everything, and often did so with remarkable thoroughness. For example, they both flooded and wrecked mines and developed special devices to blow up railroad tracks. Much of the Soviet Union became an utter wasteland. Scholars debate how to measure the devastation, but the general picture is clear. Thousands of towns and villages ceased to exist. Millions of buildings were destroyed, including tens of thousands of factories, schools, and libraries. The Soviet economy lost thousands of tractors and combine harvesters and millions of horses, cattle, hogs, sheep, and goats. It is likely that the economy lost about two-thirds of the reproducible wealth in occupied Soviet areas and one-quarter of the reproducible wealth of the Soviet Union as a whole.

The war affected Soviet Russia in other ways as well. It led to a strong upsurge of patriotism and nationalism, promoted by the Communist government itself which did all it could to mobilize the people for supreme effort and sacrifice. The army acquired new prominence and prestige, whereas from the time of the Civil War it had been kept in the background in the Soviet state. Religion, as already mentioned, profited from a more tolerant attitude on the part of the authorities. In addition, a striking religious revival developed in German-occupied territory. While the Soviet government maintained control over the people, in certain respects it somewhat relaxed its iron grip. Many Soviet citizens apparently felt freer than before the war. In particular, some *kolkhozes* simply collapsed, the peasants dividing the land and farming it in private. On the whole, because of lessened controls and a great demand for food, many peasants improved their position during the war years. In the German zone of occupation the people immediately disbanded the collectives,

The Nazis, however, later in part reintroduced them as useful devices to control peasants and obtain their produce. The war also led to closer and friendlier relations with Western allies and made widespread contacts between the Soviet and the non-Soviet world inevitable. Moreover, millions of Soviet citizens, prisoners of war, deportees, escapees, and victorious Red Army soldiers had their first look at life outside Soviet borders. Other millions, the inhabitants of the Baltic countries, eastern Poland, Bessarabia, and northern Bukovina, brought up under non-Communist systems and in different circumstances, were joined to the Soviet Union.

Another obvious result of the Second World War was the great rise in the Soviet Union's position and importance in the world. The USSR came to dominate eastern Europe, except for Greece, and much of central Europe. Barring the Allied expeditionary forces, it had no military rival on the entire continent. The international Communist movement, which had reached its nadir with the Soviet-German treaty and Hitler's victory in the west, was experiencing a veritable renaissance. After the German attack on the USSR, Communists had played major roles in numerous resistance movements, and they emerged as a great political force in many European countries, including such important Western states as France and Italy. With the total defeat and unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan, the earlier defeat of Italy, and the collapse of France, only exhausted Great Britain and the United States remained as major obstacles to Soviet ambitions in the world.

In a sense, Stalin and the Politburo had their postwar policy cut out for them. They had to rebuild the Soviet Union and to continue the industrial and general economic advance. They had to reimpose a full measure of socialism on the recalcitrant peasant and to supervise and control closely such non-Marxist sources of inspiration and belief as religion and nationalism. They had to combat the "contamination" that had come to their country from the non-Soviet world, and they had to make all their people, including the inhabitants of the newly acquired territories, into good Soviet citizens. They had to maintain complete control over the army. They had to exploit the new position of the USSR and the new, sweeping opportunities open to the Soviet Union and international communism in the postwar world. Those numerous observers who were surprised by the course of Soviet politics at home and abroad from 1945 until Stalin's death in the spring of 1953 for the most part either had failed to understand Stalin and the nature of the Soviet system or believed that they had undergone a fundamental change during the Second World War.

Reconstruction and Economic Development

To repair war damage and resume the economic advance, Stalin and the Politburo resorted, characteristically, to a five-year plan, and indeed to a sequence of such plans. The Fourth Five-Year Plan, which lasted from 1946 to 1950 and was proclaimed overfulfilled in four years and three months, was cut out of the same cloth as its predecessors. It stressed heavy industry, which absorbed some 85 percent of the total investment, particularly emphasizing the production of coal,

electrical power, iron, steel, timber, cement, agricultural machinery, and trucks. The demobilization of more than 10 million men provided the needed additional manpower, for the total number of workers and employees had declined from 31 million in 1940 to 19 million in 1943. The rebuilding of devastated towns and villages, which had begun as soon as the Germans had left, gathered momentum after the inauguration of the Plan. But the Fourth Five-Year Plan aimed at more than restoration: Russian industry, especially heavy industry, was supposed to achieve new heights of production, while labor productivity was to rise 36 percent, based on an increase in the amount of capital per worker of about 50 percent. As usual, every effort was made to force the Soviet people to work hard. A financial reform of December 1947 virtually wiped out wartime savings by requiring Soviet citizens to exchange the money they had for a new currency at the rate of ten to one. Piece work and bonuses received added emphasis. Official retail prices went up, although the concurrent abolition of rationing and of certain other forms of distribution alleviated somewhat the hardships of the consumer. Foreign economists noted a certain improvement in the urban standard of living as well as a redistribution of real income within the urban population, primarily against the poorer groups.

The Fourth Five-Year Plan obtained a great boost from reparations and other payments collected from defeated Germany and its allies. In 1947, for example, three-fourths of Soviet imports came from eastern Europe and the Soviet zone of Germany, that is, from the area dominated by Red military might. The total value of Soviet "political" imports, including reparations, as especially favorable trade provisions, and other economic arrangements, as well as resources spent by different countries for the support of Red Army troops stationed in those countries, has been estimated at the extraordinary figure of over 20 billion dollars. Some reparations were made in the form of complete factories that were dismantled, transported to the Soviet Union, and reassembled there.

In the end the Plan could well be considered a success in industry, much like its predecessors, in spite of the frequently inferior quality of products and uneven results, which included underfulfillments of the plan, overproduction (materials that could not be used), and products that simply did not work but met the numerical targets. While industry was rebuilt and even expanded in Ukraine and other western areas, the Plan marked a further industrial shift east, which grew in relative economic importance compared to the prewar period. By mobilizing resources the Soviet Union managed to maintain during the Fourth and Fifth Five-Year Plans the very high annual industrial growth rate characteristic of the first three plans and estimated by Western economists at some 12 to 14 percent on average—a figure composed of much higher rates in the late 1940s and much lower in the early 1950s. The Fifth Five-Year Plan lasted from 1951 to 1955 and thus continued beyond Stalin's rule. Similar to all the others in nature and accomplishments, it apparently made great advances in such complex fields as aviation and armament industries and atomic energy. Its completed projects included the Volga-Don canal.

Agriculture, as usual, formed an essential aspect of the plans and, again as usual, proved particularly difficult to manage successfully. The war, to repeat, produced sweeping destruction, a further sharp decline in the already insufficient supply of domestic animals, and at the same time a breakdown of discipline in many *kolkhozes*, where members proceeded to divide the land and farm it individually or at least to expand their private plots at the expense of the collective. Discipline was soon restored. By September 1, 1947, about 14 million acres had been taken away from the private holdings of members of collectives as exceeding the permissible norm. Moreover, the Politburo and the government mounted a new offensive aimed at turning the peasants at long last into good socialists. This was to be done by greatly increasing the size of the collectives—thereby decreasing their number—and at the same time increasing the size of working units in a collective, in the interests of further mechanization and division of labor. Nikita Khrushchev, who emerged as one of the leaders in postwar Soviet agriculture, even spoke of grouping peasants in *agroroda*, veritable agricultural towns, which would do away once and for all with the diffusion of labor, the isolation, and the backwardness characteristic of the countryside. The *agroroda* proved unrealistic, or at least premature, but authorities did move to consolidate some 250,000 *kolkhozes* into fewer than 100,000 larger units. In spite of all these efforts—some hostile critics believe largely because of them—peasants failed to satisfy the demands of Soviet leaders, and insufficient agricultural production remained a major weakness of the Soviet economy, as Khrushchev in effect admitted after Stalin's death.

Administration, Politics, and Control

As already mentioned, the Soviet Union acquired five new republics during the time of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. They were lost, together with other large territories, when Germany invaded the USSR and reacquired when the Red Army advanced west. The five Soviet Socialist Republics, the Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Karelo-Finnish, and Moldavian, raised the total number of component units of the USSR to sixteen. In July 1956, however, the Karelo-Finnish SSR was downgraded to its prewar status of an autonomous republic within the RSFSR, reducing the number of union republics to fifteen. The Karelo-Finnish Republic, consisting both of some older Soviet lands and of territory acquired from Finland in 1940 and again in 1944, largely failed as an expression of Finnish culture and nationality; in particular, because the inhabitants had a choice of staying or moving to Finland, virtually no people remained in the area that the Soviet Union annexed from Finland. The downgrading, therefore, seemed logical, although it might have been connected with the desire to Russify that strategic area still more effectively. While the number of union republics increased as a result of the Second World War, the number of autonomous republics was reduced: five of the latter, the Volga-German Autonomous Republic and four in the Crimea, the northern Caucasus, and adjacent areas were disbanded for sympathizing with or assisting the Germans, their populations being transported to distant regions.

As this suggests, the pursuit of conformity and control amidst the great diversity of the Soviet Union—combined with long-standing prejudice and even paranoia about ethnic and national difference—led to especially brutal policies toward certain Soviet nationalities during the war and after. Already in the 1930s, “national operations” had persecuted Poles, Germans, Finns, Cossacks, and Koreans to root out alleged nationalism. During the war, many groups, accused of sympathy for or collaboration with the Nazis, faced sudden mass deportations to Siberia or Central Asia, carried out by the NKVD. This included ethnic Germans from the Volga region, Chechens and Ingush from the north Caucasus, Crimean Tatars, Kalmyks, Meskhetian Turks from Georgia, and others. Large numbers of people died on these forced journeys. Although these deported nations were usually allowed to return to their homelands after Stalin’s death, the disruptions and resentments would linger for a very long time. The newly incorporated areas faced particular violence, since the goal was to rapidly assimilate them to the Soviet system. The occupation of these lands in 1940, and reoccupation as the Red Army advanced against the Nazis, was accompanied by deportations, arrests, and executions. Intellectuals, army officers, government officials, landowners, and clergy were especially targeted. In Stalin’s last years, the Soviet labor camp empire bulged at the seams. At the same time, nationalities not judged as suspect were often courted during the war: national units were established, the unity of all the peoples of the USSR was emphasized, and national and native religions were allowed more freedom. On the other hand, both during the war and especially afterward, the leadership and contributions of the Russian people were insistently emphasized.

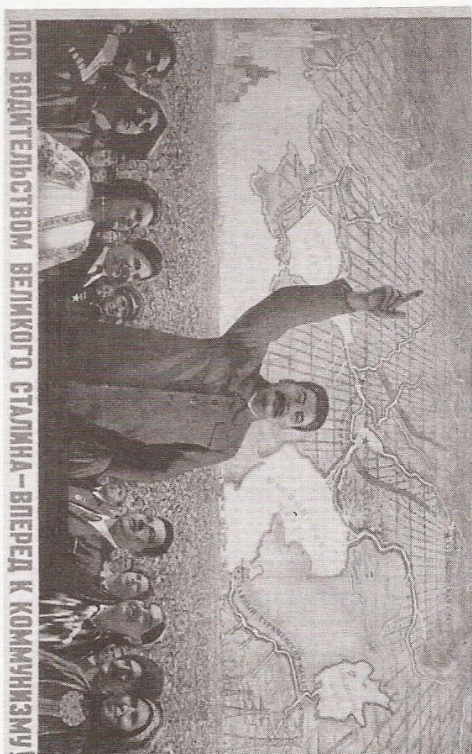
The political system changed little during these years. Union-wide elections were held in 1946 for the first time since 1937, and again in 1950. The new Supreme Soviets acted, of course, as no more than rubber stamps for Stalin and the government. Republican and other local elections also took place. In minimum age for office holders was raised from eighteen to twenty-three. In 1946 people’s commissariats became ministries. More important, their number was reduced in the postwar years and they were more strongly centralized in Moscow. Shortly before his death, Stalin carried out a potentially important change in the top party administration: the Politburo as well as the Organizational Bureau were abolished and replaced by the Presidium, which was to consist of ten Politburo members, the eleventh being dropped, plus another fifteen high Soviet leaders. But Stalin died without calling together the Presidium. After his death its announced membership was reduced to ten, so that as an institution it differed from the Politburo only in name, and even the name was restored after Khrushchev’s fall.

The postwar years also witnessed militant reaffirmation of Communist orthodoxy in ideology and culture. While more will be said about this subject in a later chapter, it might be noted here that scholarship, literature, and the arts all suffered from the imposition of a party *strazhniket*. Moreover, Andrei Zhdanov, a member of the Politburo and the party boss of Leningrad during the critical decade, who led the campaign to restore orthodoxy, emerged as

Stalin’s most prominent lieutenant from 1946 until Zhdanov’s sudden death in August 1948. That death—engineered by Stalin in the opinion of some specialists—again left the problem of succession wide open. The aging dictator was surrounded during his last years by a few surviving old leaders, his long-time associates, such as Molotov, Marshal Klement Voroshilov, Lazar Kaganovich, and Anastas Mikoyan, as well as by some younger men who had become prominent after the great purge, notably Beria, Khrushchev, and Georgii Malenkov. Malenkov in particular appeared to gain consistently in importance and to loom as Stalin’s most likely successor.

Foreign Policy

Stalin’s last decade saw extremely important developments in Soviet foreign policy. Crucial events of the postwar years included the expansion of Soviet power in eastern Europe, the breakdown of the wartime cooperation between the USSR and its Western allies, and the polarization of the world into the Communist and the anti-Communist blocs, headed by the Soviet Union and the United States, respectively. Scholars have much debated the origins of the “cold war.” Many have placed the blame chiefly on the Soviet side. That the Soviet Union proved intractable in its dealings with the West, that it did what it could to expand its own bloc (including, as the West saw it, betraying the promise of freedom and democratic elections in eastern Europe), and that it received support from Communist movements all over the world followed logically from the nature and new opportunities of Soviet communism. Other scholars have pointed to a deep tradition of anticommunism in the West, especially in the United States, and to America’s own ambitions for a dominant role in the postwar world. A related argument emphasizes Soviet anxieties about Western, especially American, intentions after the war, specifically fears that the capitalist West (naturally hostile to communism and emerging from the war with America’s new atomic power in hand) would take advantage of the Soviet Union’s economic debility in the wake of the war. Stalin understood that Russia was not yet ready to survive a major new attack against it. To protect Soviet power against the capitalist West, it is argued, the Soviet Union needed Communist allies on its western borders and to project an image of strength (which required not only showing what the Red Army could do in eastern Europe but also erecting barriers to keep information about real conditions in Russia as hidden as possible). The postwar break between Russia and the West can also be explained by short-term considerations. The Soviet leaders, too, had prepared little for the postwar period, and in their preparation they had concentrated on such objectives as rendering Germany permanently harmless. The sweeping Soviet expansion in eastern Europe occurred at least in part because of special circumstances: the rapid Western withdrawal of forces and demobilization, the fact that it became apparent that free elections in most eastern European countries would result in anti-Soviet governments, and the pressure of local Communists as well as, possibly, the urging of the more activist group within the Soviet leadership.



"Under the Leadership of the Great Stalin—Forward to Communism," 1951. Stalin, the "father of the peoples," stands with representatives of varied Soviet nationalities and before a map showing plans for massive canals and hydroelectric projects. (Victoria Bonnell)

The Soviet Union and the Allies cooperated long enough to put into operation their arrangement for dividing and ruling Germany and to bring top Nazi leaders to trial before an international tribunal at Nuremberg in 1946. Also, in February 1947, the victorious powers signed peace treaties with Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Finland. The Soviet Union confirmed its territorial gains from Romania and Finland, including a lease of the Finnish base of Porkkala, and obtained extensive reparations. Rounding out its acquisitions, the USSR obtained the so-called Carpatho-Ruthenian area from friendly Czechoslovakia in 1945. While most inhabitants of that region spoke Ukrainian, they had not been connected with any Russian state since the days of Kievan Rus.

But on the whole cooperation between the USSR and the Western powers broke down quickly and decisively. No agreement on the international control of atomic energy could be reached, the Soviet Union refusing to participate in the Atomic Energy Commission created by the United Nations in 1946. In the same year a grave crisis developed over the Soviet government's efforts to obtain significant concessions from Persia, or Iran, and its refusal to follow the example of Great Britain and the United States and withdraw its troops from that country after the end of the war. Although, as a result of Western pressure and the airing of the question in the United Nations, Soviet forces did finally leave Iran, the hostility between former allies became increasingly apparent.

The Communist seizure of power in eastern Europe contributed very heavily to the division of the world into two opposed blocs. While many details of the process varied from country to country, the end result in each case was the firm entrenchment of a Communist regime cooperating with and dominated by the Soviet Union. The same happened in eastern Germany. Only Greece and Finland managed to escape Communist rule. Liberated Greece fell into the British rather than the Soviet sphere, and its government, supported by Great Britain and the United States, managed to win a bitter civil war against the Communist-led Left. The fact that Finland survived as an independent nation remains puzzling. It could be that Moscow first overestimated the strength of Finnish Communists, who did play a prominent part in the government of the country immediately after the war, and then decided not to force the issue in a changing international situation after the Finnish Communists failed to seize power. In particular, the Soviet Union probably wanted to avoid driving Sweden into the camp of Soviet enemies. Similarly—at a greater distance from the USSR—the large and strong Communist and allied parties in France and Italy, very prominent in the first years following the war, were forced out of coalition governments and had to limit themselves to the role of an opposition bent largely on obstruction.

It has frequently been said that communism won in Europe only in countries occupied by the Red Army, and that point deserves to be kept in mind. Yet it does not tell the whole story. Whereas in Poland, for example, native Communists were extremely weak, in Yugoslavia and Albania they had led resistance movements against the Axis powers and had attained dominant positions by the end of the war (though strong indigenous Communist movements also made these countries, especially Yugoslavia, more difficult to control). Perhaps more important, the Soviet Union preferred to rely in all cases on local party members, while holding the Red Army in readiness as the ultimate argument. Usually, the "reactionary" elements, including monarchs where such were present and the upper classes in general as well as fascists, would be forced out of political life and a "united front" of "progressive" elements formed to govern the country. Next the Communists destroyed or at least weakened and neutralized their partners in the front to establish in effect, if not always in form, their single-party dictatorship even though the party might be known as the "workers'" or "socialist unity" party rather than simply "Communist." It is worth noting that the eastern European Communists had the most trouble with agrarian parties, just as the Bolsheviks had met their most dangerous rivals in the Socialist Revolutionaries. In Roman Catholic countries, such as Poland and Hungary, they also experienced strong and persistent opposition from the Church. The Communist seizure of power in Czechoslovakia proved particularly disturbing to the non-Communist world, because it occurred as late as 1948 and disposed of a regime headed by President Beneš which had enjoyed popular support and maintained friendly relations with the Soviet Union. The new Communist governments in eastern Europe proclaimed themselves to be "popular democracies." They followed the Soviet lead in introducing economic plans, industrializing, collectivizing

agriculture—sometimes gradually, however—and establishing minute regulation over all phases of life, including culture. As in the USSR, the political police played a key role in social transformation and control. Local scholars in these countries have argued strongly that for most of Communist eastern Europe, with the notable exception of Poland, occupation by Moscow was harsher than occupation by Nazi Germany.

Winston Churchill, at the time out of office, was among the first Western statesmen to speak openly of the danger of Communist influence in eastern Europe. In a speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, in March 1946, he described an "iron curtain" separating the "Soviet sphere" from the rest of the continent. The foreign policies of the United States soon reflected this sense of global divide and a "cold war"—a term that began to be used in the United States around this time. When another year of negotiations with the USSR produced no results, President Truman appealed to Congress for funds to provide military and economic aid to Greece and Turkey, whose independence was threatened directly or indirectly by the Communist state; this policy came to be known as the Truman Doctrine. In June 1947 the Marshall Plan was introduced to help rebuild the economies of European countries devastated by war. Because the Soviet Union and its satellites would not participate, the plan became a powerful bond for the Western bloc. Next, in 1949, twelve Western countries, the United States, Great Britain, Canada, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, and Portugal, signed the Atlantic Defense Pact of mutual aid against aggression. A permanent North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and armed force were subsequently created, under General Eisenhower's command. Also in 1949, the U.S. Congress passed a broad Mutual Defense Assistance Program to aid American allies all over the world. With these agreements and with numerous bases girding the USSR, the United States and other countries organized to meet the perceived Soviet threat.

The Communist bloc also organized. In 1947 the Communist Information Bureau, known as Cominform, replaced the Communist International, which had been disbanded in 1943. Bringing together the Communist parties of the USSR, eastern Europe, France, and Italy, the Cominform aimed at better coordination of Communist efforts in Europe. Zhdanov, who represented the Soviet party, set the unmistakably militant tone of the organization. But Communist cooperation was dealt a major blow by the break between Yugoslavia and the USSR, backed by its satellites, in the summer of 1948. Tito chose to defy Stalin because he wanted to retain full effective control of his own country and resented the role assigned to Yugoslavia in the economic and other plans of the Soviet bloc. He succeeded in his bold undertaking because he had a strong organization and support at home in contrast to other eastern European Communist leaders, many of whom were simply Soviet puppets, and because the Soviet Union did not dare invade Yugoslavia, apparently from fear of the probable international complications. Tito's unprecedented defection created the new phenomenon of "national" communism, independent of the Soviet bloc. It led to major purges of potential heretics in other eastern

European Communist parties, which took the lives of some of the most important Communists of eastern Europe and resembled in many respects the great Soviet purge of the 1930s.

The Western world confronted the Soviet in many places and on many issues. Continuous confrontation in the United Nations resulted in little more than Soviet Russia's constant use of its veto power in the Security Council. Thus, of the eighty vetoes cast there in the decade from 1945 to 1955, seventy-seven belonged to the Soviet Union. The two sides also faced each other in Germany. Because of the new enmity of the wartime allies, the Allied Control Council in Germany failed to function almost from the beginning, and no agreement could be reached concerning the unification of Germany or the peace treaty with that country. Finally, the Federal Republic of Germany with its government in Bonn was established in the Western-occupied zones in May 1949, while the German Democratic Republic was created in the Soviet-held area in October of the same year. The first naturally sided with the West and eventually joined NATO. The second formed an integral part of the Soviet bloc. Cold war in Germany reached its height in the summer of 1948 when Soviet authorities stopped the overland supply of the American, British, and French sectors of Berlin. Since that city, located 110 miles within the Soviet zone, was under the jurisdiction of the four powers, three of them Western, it, or rather West Berlin, remained a highly provocative and disturbing "window of freedom" in rapidly Stalinized eastern Germany and eastern Europe. But Soviet hopes of forcing the Western powers to abandon their part of the city failed; a mammoth airlift was maintained for months by American and British planes to keep West Berlin supplied until the Soviet Union discontinued its blockade.

Postwar events in Asia were as important as the developments in Europe. Communists made bids to seize power in such different areas as Indonesia, Malaya, and Burma. They succeeded in China. The great Chinese civil war ended in 1949 with Chiang Kai-shek's evacuation to Formosa—or Taiwan—and the proclamation of the Communist Chinese People's Republic, with Mao Zedong at its head, on the mainland. Although the Soviet Union took no direct part in the Chinese war and at first apparently even tried to restrain Mao, it helped Chinese Communists with supplies and fully backed Mao's new regime. And indeed Communist victory in a country of great size inhabited by some half a billion people meant an enormous accretion of strength to the Soviet bloc, although it also created serious problems: China could not be expected to occupy the role of a satellite, such as Bulgaria or Czechoslovakia, and the Communist world acquired in effect a second center of leadership. By an agreement concluded in 1950, the USSR ceded to Communist China its railroad possessions in Manchuria, although briefly retaining a naval base at Port Arthur.

In Korea cold war turned to actual hostilities. There, as in Germany, no agreement could be reached by the victorious powers, and eventually two governments were formed, one in American-occupied southern Korea and the other in the Soviet north, the thirty-eighth parallel dividing the two. At

the end of June 1950, North Korea attacked South Korea. In the ensuing years of fighting, which resulted in the two sides occupying approximately the same positions when the military action stopped as they had in the beginning, U.S. forces and some contingents from other countries came to the assistance of South Korea in execution of a mandate of the United Nations, whereas tens and even hundreds of thousands of Chinese "volunteers" intervened on the North Korean side. The Soviet army itself did not participate in the war, although the North Koreans and the Chinese used Soviet-made aircraft and weapons, and although Soviet advisers, as well as Soviet pilots and other technicians, were in North Korea. Although the front became stabilized in the summer of 1951, no armistice could be concluded until the summer of 1953, after Stalin's death.

The End of Stalin

Stalin's final years were also marked by an intensified "cult of personality," as Khrushchev would brand it. Statues and pictures of the "great leader" proliferated, songs and poems were written in his honor, public ceremonies honored him, his every pronouncement was treated as sacred truth, and his eulogists vied with one another to find greater superlatives with which to describe this "greatest genius of humankind" who brought nothing but joy to every decent Soviet person and struck terror in the hearts of all the enemies of socialist happiness. At the same time, Stalin grew increasingly distrustful of all around him. Stalin's final months, especially, had a certain weird quality to them. It could be that the madness that kept peering through the method during his entire rule asserted itself with new vigor. With international tensions high, dark clouds gathered at home. In January 1953, nine doctors were accused of having assassinated a number of Soviet leaders, including Zhdanov, and of planning to murder others. Seven of the arrested doctors were Jewish, and anti-Semitism, visibly on the rise in the postwar years (including anti-Jewish purges in some institutions), especially after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, was clearly evident in reporting about the "doctor's plot." But Jews were only one of the targets. Beria's police were charged with insufficient vigilance. The press whipped up a campaign against traitors. Everything pointed to another great purge. Then on March 4 it was announced that Stalin had suffered a stroke on the first of the month, and on the morning of the sixth the news came that he had died the previous night. Some of the dictator's entourage especially close to him disappeared at the same time.

CHAPTER 40



The Soviet Union after Stalin, 1953–85

We must seriously consider and correctly analyze this question in order to preclude any possibility of repeating in any form whatsoever that which took place during the time of Stalin, who was completely intolerant of collectivity in leadership and in work and who deployed brutal force against not only everyone who contradicted him but against anyone who seemed to him, given his capricious and despotic character, to contradict his way of thinking... Comrades, we must decisively, once and for all, dethrone the cult of the personality... For this purpose, it is necessary: First, in a Bolshevik manner to condemn and eradicate the cult of the personality as alien to Marxism-Leninism and inconsistent with the principles of party leadership and the norms of party life... Second, systematically and consistently to continue the work done by the party's Central Committee in recent years to ensure strict compliance in all party organizations, from the bottom to the top, with Leninist principles of party leadership, which are characterized, above all, by the highest principle of collective leadership, by adherence to the norms of party life as fixed in the statutes of our party, and by expanding the practice of criticism and self-criticism. Third, to restore completely the Leninist principles of Soviet socialist democracy, expressed in the Constitution of the Soviet Union, and to fight against the willful arbitrariness of individuals who abuse their power.

NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV, SPEECH TO THE
TWENTIETH PARTY CONGRESS, 1956

With every year and with every month that passes, with every day one may say, the active peace-loving policy of the Soviet Union and other countries of socialism gives the peoples of the earth ever new convincing proof that the concepts of socialism and peace are indivisible... Our people are working under the banner of peace and are carrying on the struggle for peace in the cause of the

emancipation of labor. Under the red banner of peace and labor we have scored outstanding successes that are admired by all honest people of the world. Under this banner we shall score great new victories.... Permit me from the bottom of my heart to wish all citizens of our great country, all builders of communism, every Soviet family, every Soviet person, the greatest success in their noble work and the greatest happiness.

LEONID BREZHNEV, MAY DAY 1973

Stalin's stroke—if its official date is to be believed—was followed by three days of silence from the Kremlin and, in all probability, by hard bargaining among top Soviet leaders. When the dictator's demise was announced, the new leadership proclaimed itself ready to govern the country, emphasizing the solidarity of its members as well as its unity with the people. The shrill tone and the constant repetition of both assertions must have covered many suspicions and fears. Malenkov emerged clearly in the chief role, for he became presumably both the senior party secretary, which had been Stalin's most important office, and prime minister. Beria and Molotov stood next to Malenkov, forming a triumvirate of successors to the dictator. The three, in that order, were the key living figures during Stalin's burial in the Lenin Mausoleum in Red Square on March 9, making appropriate speeches on the occasion.

The Rise, Rule, and Fall of Nikita Khrushchev

As early as the middle of March, however, it was announced that Malenkov had resigned as the party secretary, although he remained prime minister and continued to be treated as the top personage in the Soviet Union. The new Presidium of the party was reduced to ten members. Later it was announced that Khrushchev had been promoted to the position of first party secretary, the title used instead of that of general secretary associated with Stalin. In the summer of 1953, Beria was arrested and then executed in secret, with a number of his followers, on charges of treason and conspiracy; or, as Khrushchev related to some visitors, Beria was killed at the Presidium meeting at which he had expected to assume full power. In any case, it would seem that in the race to dispose of one another Beria had narrowly lost out. Beria's fall marked a certain weakening in the power of the political police. In February 1955, Malenkov resigned as prime minister, saying that he was guilty of mistakes made in the management of Soviet agriculture and of having incorrectly emphasized the production of consumer goods at the expense of heavy industry. Nikolai Bulganin, a prominent Communist leader who had been a member of the Politburo since 1948, replaced Malenkov as head of the government. Bulganin and Khrushchev, the chief of the government and the chief of the party, then occupied the center of the Soviet stage and also held the limelight in international affairs, suggesting to some observers the existence of something resembling a diarchy in the USSR. Marshal Zhukov, a great hero of the Second World War who had been reduced by Stalin to provincial commands and had returned to prominence after Stalin's death, took over Bulganin's



Stalin's funeral. From right: Khrushchev, Beria, Chou En-Lai, Malenkov, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Bulganin, Molotov. (Sofphoto)

former office of minister of defense. Zhukov's rise marked the first appearance of an essentially military, rather than party, figure in high governing circles in Soviet Russia.

The struggle in the Kremlin continued. Probably its most astounding event—though its significance reached far beyond the struggle for power—was Khrushchev's speech to a closed session of the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956, in which the new first secretary denounced his predecessor, Stalin, as a cruel, irrational, and bloodthirsty tyrant. Stalin was accused of creating a "personality cult" around himself, of ruling in arbitrary and tyrannical ways, of violating the principles of Marxism-Leninism, of violating the norms of collective leadership, of imagining enemies and then exterminating them, of killing many party activists and leaders, of decimating the army leadership, of failing to ensure Soviet preparedness for the war, and of unjustified mass deportations of nationality groups. At the same, these colossal crimes were viewed as a deviation from the essentially correct norms and policies of Marxism-Leninism and rectified by the collective leadership that replaced the despot. Khrushchev's explosive speech—though known as the "secret speech," it was either read or summarized to millions of party members and most of the text soon made its way into the Western press—remains difficult to explain: after all, these breathtaking revelations were certain to produce shock among Communists after years of endless adulation of Stalin and public lies and perhaps harm the Communist cause internationally. Besides, Khrushchev could not help but implicate himself and other leading Communists, at least indirectly, in Stalin's crimes and errors. One answer to the riddle of the speech lies

in the exigencies of the struggle for power among Soviet leaders. Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin struck at some "old Stalinists," his main competitors. No less important, Khrushchev and his allies may have been trying to save communism from Stalinism by blaming the worst aspects of the Soviet past on one individual rather than on the system itself, on the party as an institution, or on its guiding ideology. In practice, the revelations of Stalin's crimes, a process that would continue unevenly in the coming years, did undermine the faith of some people in the system that produced Stalin.

The conflict at the top reached its culmination in the spring and early summer of 1957, after the Hungarian rebellion of the preceding autumn and certain other events at home and abroad had raised grave questions concerning the orientation and activities of the new Soviet administration and indeed the stability of the whole Soviet system. Defeated in the Presidium concerning the stability of the whole Soviet system. Defeated in the Presidium of the party, Khrushchev took his case to its entire Central Committee, successfully reversing the unfavorable decision and obtaining the ouster from the Presidium and other positions of power of the "anti-party group" of Malenkov, Molotov, Kaganovich, and Dmitrii Shepilov, a recent addition to the Soviet front ranks. While Khrushchev's enemies were dropped from the Presidium, its membership was increased to fifteen, giving the general secretary further opportunities to bring his supporters into that extremely important body. Finally in March 1958, Bulganin, who had been disloyal to Khrushchev the preceding year, resigned as head of the government. Khrushchev himself replaced Bulganin, thus combining the supreme effective authority of the party and of the state.

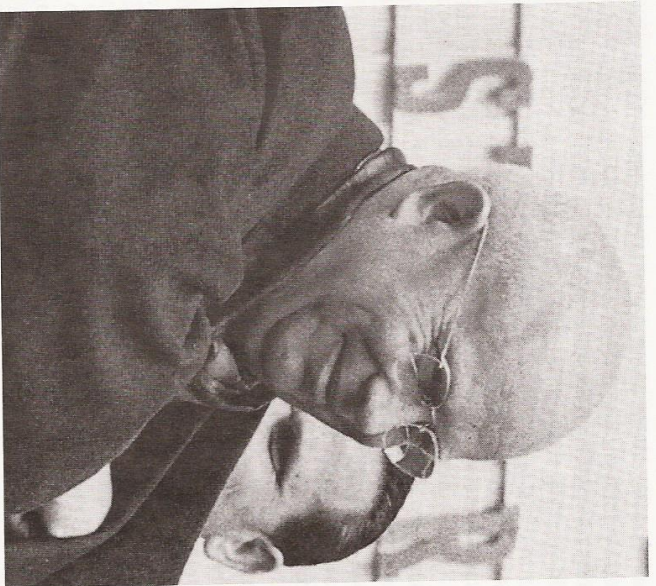
Khrushchev's biography and personality shaped his actions and policies. He was born in 1894 into a poor peasant family in a southern Russian village. His father became a migrant worker. Starting in 1908, Khrushchev lived in the Donbas (Donetsk Basin) region of Ukraine, where he became a skilled metalworker with ambitions to become an engineer. His education included no more than four years of primary school, though, after the revolution, he briefly attended a special school for workers and gained some additional technical training. During the revolution and Civil War, he became involved in Bolshevik politics and entered a career in the Soviet state and the Communist Party, first in Ukraine, then in Moscow, where he became the city's party boss, then back to Ukraine as party leader in 1938, and then again to Moscow in 1949 when Stalin recalled him to join the top leadership. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Khrushchev was a devoted Stalinist of a practical bent: he supervised construction of the Moscow metro, devoted much energy to developing Ukrainian industry and agriculture, and participated actively in the purges. He took great pride in helping to build socialism. But he also later admitted that his arms were "up to the elbows in blood." In this light, the "secret speech" can be seen as the act of a devoted Communist and pragmatist and as a type of repentance. Khrushchev was a complex figure: a devoted Stalinist who became a driven de-Stalinizer, a reformer and practical builder but also a figure of limited capacities and irrational methods. As William Taubman, who has written the best biography of Khrushchev, concluded, "despite his

miraculous rise, his doubts about both his capacities and his sins remained, exacerbated by domestic and foreign-policy troubles that came crowding in on him, troubles to which he responded with increasingly desperate and reckless actions which, rather than consolidating and extending his achievement, ultimately ensured his defeat." On the other hand, we should remember that "the reforms of the Khrushchev period, awkward and erratic though they were, allowed a nascent civil society to take shape where Stalinism had created a desert."

Khrushchev's reforms involved significant initiatives in a number of areas, though many produced unexpected results or simply failed. His first priority was agriculture, where he tried to stimulate production through administrative reorganizations, by encouraging more active party involvement in production, and through various heroic "campaigns" such as the "virgin lands" campaign, the meat and milk campaign, and the corn campaign. He tried to encourage better industrial management and more production of consumer goods, again through administrative reorganizations and campaigns. A massive boom in housing construction was also initiated. These policies, as will be discussed later, resulted in an advancing economy and substantial improvements in people's everyday material lives. Perhaps the most consequential reform was de-Stalinization of culture. After the long winter of Stalinist cultural politics—the required adherence in all the arts to the strictures of Stalinist "socialist realism"—a "thaw" began. Writers and artists, but also scholars and journalists, were able to speak more openly of the crimes of the past, to criticize inadequacies in Soviet life, and, especially, to pay more attention to the experiences and needs of the individual rather than only the collective, the party, and building socialism.

The remarkable Twenty-second Party Congress held in the second half of October 1961 gave ready approval to the new leader's twenty-year program of "building communism" and denounced his enemies at home and abroad. Another old leader, Voroshilov, was linked to the "anti-party group." In a much more unexpected development, however, Khrushchev and the Congress returned to the grizzly issue of Stalinism, detailing and documenting many of its atrocities. The removal of Stalin's body from the mausoleum in Red Square, the renaming of the cities named after Stalin, with Stalingrad becoming Volgograd, and the publicity given for the first time to certain aspects of the great purge must have had a powerful impact on many Soviet minds.

In retrospect, although Khrushchev seemed triumphant at the party congress in 1961, his fortunes were in decline. The year 1958 was probably his zenith. That year followed Khrushchev's decisive defeat of his competitors for power in the "anti-party group" and the sensational Soviet inauguration of the space age with the launching of the first Sputnik. There was a bounteous harvest and industrial production continued to grow at a strong rate. The ebullient Khrushchev could readily believe, and every indication is that he did believe, his own declarations that the USSR would very soon "catch up and overtake" the United States, that every citizen would at last enjoy the good life



Nikita Khrushchev. (Sorfoto)

that socialism had always promised, and even that the Utopia of communism was only a couple of decades over the horizon.

But problems and disillusionments followed in rapid succession. Economic development went sour, Khrushchev's exhortations, and his economic, administrative, and party reorganizations, together with his hectic campaigns to remedy particular deficiencies—to be discussed later in this chapter—were increasingly ineffective in resolving the crisis. In his last years and months in office Khrushchev saw the rate of industrial growth decline sharply while he had to resort to an unprecedented purchase of Canadian wheat to forestall hunger at home. De-Stalinization or, more broadly, a certain "liberalization" of Soviet life seemed to produce as many problems as it resolved. It led in effect to soul-searching and instability rather than to any outburst of creative communist energy. The world situation—also to be discussed later—deteriorated even more sharply from the Soviet point of view. In 1960 the conflict with China, which dated back at least to Khrushchev's original de-Stalinization of 1956, burst into the open, and from about 1963 the break between the former allies seemed irreparable. In the relations with the West, Khrushchev's aggressive enthusiasm, spurred by the successes of Soviet space technology, received repeated checks in Germany and finally

suffered a smashing defeat in October 1962 in the crucial confrontation with the United States over the Soviet missiles in Cuba. Khrushchev's survival of the catastrophe of his apparently largely personal foreign policy might be considered a sign of the continuing power of the single leader in the Soviet authoritarian system. But this system, too, was weakening. The party elite was deeply wary of allowing a new dictator. And the leader, in turn, no longer had at his command the mechanisms of power that Stalin had. Observers noted that although the Twenty-second Party Congress confirmed and extended Khrushchev's victory over the "anti-party group" these enemies of the leader were not even expelled from the party. It would seem that during this time Khrushchev made the mistake of acting in an increasingly autocratic and arbitrary manner even though his power was not nearly as great as Stalin's had been.

On October 15, 1964, it was announced in Moscow that Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev had been "released" from both his party and his government positions, because of "advanced age and deterioration of his health."

The Brezhnev Era

In many ways, Khrushchev's relatively brief reign was a culmination of a long history of revolutionary politics. Khrushchev oriented his government and the party toward "building communism" domestically and internationally and he pursued these goals through dramatic (and erratic) campaigns and reforms. His successors brought a very different spirit and purpose to rule: the guiding principle was stability not change, order not revolution. It is significant that the new collective leadership that came to power in 1964—with Leonid Brezhnev, chosen as party leader, quickly emerging as the dominant figure—was the first generation of rulers to come of age after 1917. They were children during the revolution, most received technical educations; all were promoted rapidly through the party and the state during the First Five-Year Plan; all benefited from the Great Purge, which opened opportunities to enter the higher ranks. Overall, they were practical men concerned with stable power and effective policies of economic development. Political scientists studying the regime described the years that this steadily aging and increasingly conservative generation were in power as a time of "oligarchical petrification," but also, no less importantly, as a time of the "modernization" of government. Close studies of Soviet politics after Khrushchev paid less attention to the formal claims of ideology and more to how Soviet institutions actually worked. This led to interpretations such as Jerry Hough's notion of a "return to normalcy" involving rational administration, institutional pluralism, and political interest groups. What scholars did not see was true revolutionary purpose. Or at least, as Stephen Hanson has argued, there was a "routinization of Soviet revolutionary modernity."

The new leaders—especially Brezhnev as party head, Alexei Kosygin as prime minister, Mikhail Suslov as chief party ideologist, Nikolai Podgorny as chairman of the Supreme Soviet, and others—moved quickly to undo most

of Khrushchev's reforms. His administrative reorganizations were canceled. The radical ideas of limiting terms in office and encouraging public criticism of bureaucracy were replaced by a conservative policy that ensured job stability for the bureaucracy. The ideal of rational and orderly government was expressed in denunciations of Khrushchev's "hare-brained schemes," "mad improvisations," "voluntarism," and "subjectivism." Economic experiments that had tried to spur local initiative were replaced by central control from Moscow (though plans to decentralize management of enterprises, to emphasize the production of consumer goods, and to rely more on consumer demand were considered in the early Brezhnev years). The Twenty-third Party Congress held in the spring of 1966, a giant affair with around 5,000 delegates, approved many of these measures. The Congress also agreed to allow the Presidium to again be called, as in the days of Stalin, the Politburo, and the first secretary of the party to again be called the general secretary. In the years that followed, Brezhnev and his associates also brought the cultural "thaw" to an end: the crimes of the past were to be ignored and critical writers were silenced. The power and role of the KGB grew rapidly, though mass terror, viewed as dangerous to the system, was not reinstated. Ideologically, rhetoric shifted from talking about the coming of "communism" to a focus on the achievements of the past that had created a society of "developed socialism" in the present. Of course, socialist rhetoric did not disappear, especially when criticizing Western capitalism and imperialism. But, Stephen Hanson has argued, "Brezhnevian stability," especially by the 1970s, "had degenerated into a 'neo-traditional' form of rule in which Marxism-Leninism became a set of quasi-religious rituals."

The later years of Brezhnev's rule were famously described by Mikhail Gorbachev as the "era of stagnation." One very visible aspect of this was the dramatic aging of the leadership: by the late 1970s, most of the Soviet Union's leaders, in virtually every institution, were men (rarely women) in their sixties and seventies. Many, like Brezhnev himself, were physically ailing. Similarly, the growth of the economy was slowing and society, as we shall see, was increasingly alienated from the government and the whole socialist project. Nonetheless, the Soviet leadership launched important initiatives in these years, including strengthening Soviet military might, economic policies emphasizing development in such crucial sectors as agriculture and energy, and an international policy of "détente," which sought to maintain the super-power status of the USSR with less political danger and economic cost.

At the heart of domestic politics during the Brezhnev years, and key to the regime's stability, it has been argued, was a generous policy of catering to the interests of elites combined with a growing welfare state for the population at large. In 1965, the Brezhnev leadership took as its motto the phrase "trust in cadres." In practice, this meant, for example, that greater job security than ever before was assured. Material interests were also taken into account. Institutional interests were respected by providing their departments with good budgets. Most important, personal interests and desires were catered to with extensive privileges in such areas as consumer goods, housing, medical



Soviet leaders at Kremlin Meeting of the Supreme Soviet Celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, November 4, 1967. From left: Brezhnev, Kosygin, Podgorny, Suslov. (*World Wide Photos*)

care, and travel abroad. The effect, scholars have argued, was to create a loyal managerial class, one of the keys to the stability of the system.

At the same time, the Soviet welfare state grew, partly as a means to ensure popular toleration of this increasingly hierarchical society. Individuals were offered opportunities for upward mobility—even the opportunity to join the privileged elite—through hard work and political loyalty. But efforts were also made to ensure broader benefits. Political scientists have spoken of an implicit "social contract" between the government and the population. Repression remained (for publicly criticizing policies, for spending unauthorized time with foreigners, for damaging or stealing socialist property, for illegal buying and selling) but it was not random or inexplicable. Most important, material promises were made and partly fulfilled: free medical care for all citizens (though quality was often low), the complete lack of unemployment, guaranteed pensions at retirement, more housing so that families could live in their own apartments, subsidized prices for essential food products, and a growing consumer economy. Indeed, living standards measurably rose, and some commentators began to write of a Soviet version of consumer attitudes and a consumer society. This is not to say that Soviet citizens did not notice or resent the growing privileges of the elite. Anecdotes, a widespread form of subtle everyday critique of the systems, often spoke of this inequality. In one, Brezhnev's uneducated mother, at the sight of her son's splendid collection of motor cars, voiced concern: "That is fine, my dear son, but what if the Bolsheviks return?" As the Soviet economic situation became more difficult

in the late 1970s and early 1980s, this system of rewards and welfare became more difficult to sustain. Yet, the Brezhnev government attempted essentially palliatives rather than fundamental reform. As described by a Western specialist, the decision had been made "to settle for short-run solutions to long-term problems."

When Brezhnev died, finally, on November 10, 1982, at the age of seventy-five, he had outlived such near-peers as Kosygin, by about two years, and the chief party ideologist, Suslov, by less than a year. Podgorny had been ousted from the leadership in 1977; Brezhnev's long-time lieutenant, Andrei Kirilenko, slightly older than his patron, lost his Politburo position in 1982, whether for political or medical reasons. Yet the remaining leaders still belonged to the same well-established group and were of comparable age and, as far as one could tell, orientation. Nikolai Tikhonov, who replaced Kosygin as prime minister, was born, like Brezhnev, in 1906; Konstantin Chernenko, probably closest to Brezhnev at the time of the latter's death, was only five years younger; Dmitrii Ustinov, the man in charge of what may be described as the Soviet military-industrial complex, was born in 1908. That the general Secretaryship of the party went to Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov, sixty-eight, was not unexpected, although some observers were surprised by the rapidity and smoothness of the transition. Credited with uncommon intelligence and general ability, as well as a certain sophistication, Andropov became well-



Brezhnev on a skimobile, probably near his country house. Among the many material benefits of power he enjoyed, Brezhnev had a particular fondness for motor vehicles of all sorts. In particular, he had a large collection of luxury and imported cars. (V. Akhmedjan)

known as the head of the KGB, the political police, for the fifteen years before he switched in May 1982 to work in the party secretariat. Andropov's earlier service included the position of ambassador to Hungary in 1954-57, when he became linked, apparently, both to the brutal suppression of the Hungarian revolt and to the institution of a liberal economic policy in Hungary in its wake. A sharp critic of the stagnation and corruption under Brezhnev, Andropov addressed himself immediately to purging the administrative apparatus and to strengthening labor discipline by such spectacular measures as police searches in public places for absentee workers. But his activity was cut short by kidney failure, and he died after only about a year and three months in office. Andropov was replaced by Chernenko, Brezhnev's intended heir and already a sick man, who lived for barely another year. Then, on March 11, 1985, Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev, Andropov's fifty-four-year-old protégé, was elected by the Politburo to the general secretaryship of the party.

Economic Development and Stagnation

A significant change in Soviet economic life occurred in 1957, when Khrushchev, in a move aimed at a geographic dispersion, or deconcentration—although not organizational decentralization—of authority, transferred the direction of a good proportion of industry from the ministries in Moscow to regional Economic Councils. Reflecting the constant Soviet search for the most effective and efficient economic organization, this reform was nevertheless considered by many observers as primarily political in motivation: it removed from Moscow large economic managerial staffs which, it would seem, had supported Malenkov in the struggle for power within the Kremlin. Another aim might have been to give the local party bosses more authority in economic matters and thus to stimulate local initiative.

The Sixth Five-Year Plan, scheduled to run from 1956 to 1960, was cut short in 1958, replaced by a Seven-Year Plan to last from 1959 through 1965. The official explanation for the change stressed the discovery of vast new natural resources that altered Soviet economic prospects. The more likely reason was that the Sixth Five-Year Plan had fallen considerably behind its assigned norms of production and the Soviet leadership decided to try a fresh start. Western economists such as Robert Campbell and Naum Jasny judged the industrial goals of the Seven-Year Plan to be quite realistic. While concentrating as usual on heavy industry, with special attention paid to, for example, further electrification and development of the chemical industry, the plan called for a rate of industrial growth approximately 20 percent slower than that achieved during the Fifth Five-Year Plan. In this sense it was also less ambitious than the abortive Sixth Five-Year Plan. In results, the Soviet economy continued to gain in relative output on the American economy, helped by such developments as the recession in the United States and the Western world in general in the 1970s and 1980s.

Although concentrating on capital goods, the Seven-Year Plan allowed somewhat more for the everyday needs of the people than had generally

been true of previous Soviet industrialization. Especially interesting was the ambitious housing and general building program of the plan, which aimed to increase total Soviet building investment by 83 percent. Even when executed not in its entirety and with buildings of inferior quality, this aspect of the Seven-Year Plan constituted a major contribution to the improvement of the Soviet standard of living. Superior quality and unflagging attention were devoted, by contrast, to such advanced technical fields as atomic energy, rockets, missiles, and space travel. From the launching of the first artificial satellite, Sputnik I, in October 1957, the USSR achieved a remarkable series of pioneering successes in rockets and space travel.

Important developments took place in Soviet agriculture during the Khrushchev years. Indeed, frantic efforts to raise agricultural production constituted, together with certain concessions to the consumer, the salient new features of Soviet economic policy. The magnitude of the Soviet farm problem can be seen from the fact that, by contrast with industrial achievements, the gross output of agriculture in 1952 was only some 6 percent above 1928. In 1954 Khrushchev set into full operation his sweeping "virgin lands" project: huge expanses of arid lands in Soviet Asia, eventually totaling some 70 million acres, were to be brought under cultivation. This undertaking, supported by great exertion as well as by a mighty propaganda effort, gave remarkably mixed results from year to year, depending in large part on weather conditions, but did not live up to expectations. The new first secretary also started a huge corn-planting program. He further decided to boost drastically the production of such foods as meat, milk, and butter. These items came to rival electric power and steel in Soviet propaganda and to serve as significant gauges in "surpassing America."

Yet the condition of Soviet agriculture remained bad. Official claims and promises, especially the latter, differed sharply from reality. Indeed, the mass planting of corn, often in unsuitable conditions, and even the huge gamble on the virgin lands, which were difficult to cultivate, might have been unwise. To increase production Soviet authorities resorted to the old method of further socialization. Between 1953 and 1957 the number of sovkhozes increased while the number of kolkhozes declined, reducing the kolkhoz share of land under cultivation from 84 to 72 percent. As late as September 1958, Khrushchev, other leaders, and the propaganda machine still spoke of the more truly socialist nature, as well as of the technical superiority, of the sovkhoz system of agriculture over that of the kolkhoz. Yet, apparently because of the strength of peasant resistance, especially of the passive kind, the first secretary stopped the attack on kolkhozes in early 1959 at the Twenty-first Party Congress.

The official policy toward the collective farms continued to be ambivalent. There is a consensus among experts that the income of the members of the kolkhozes, extremely low at the time of Stalin's death, increased markedly in subsequent years. The collectives themselves also gained in strength. In 1958, in an abrupt reversal of previous policy, the government enacted measures to disband the Machine Tractor Stations, enabling the kolkhozes to obtain in ownership all the agricultural equipment they needed. On the other hand,

state and party pressure on the kolkhozes continued and in certain respects even gained momentum. The years witnessed a great stress on increasing the "indivisible fund" of a collective—that is, that part of its revenue which belongs to the entire kolkhoz and is not parceled out among individual members—and on using this fund for such "socially valuable" undertakings as building schools and roads in the locality. Also, Khrushchev and other leaders returned to the theme that the private plots of the members of a kolkhoz are meant merely to augment a family's food supply rather than to produce for the market and that they should become entirely unnecessary with further successes of socialist agriculture.

Moreover, the Seven-Year Plan goals of increasing agricultural production by 70 percent and raising labor productivity in the kolkhozes by 100 percent and in the sovkhozes by 60 to 65 percent proved impossible to attain. Perhaps they had been predicated on a further drastic socialization of Soviet agriculture, and in particular on the elimination or near elimination of the 20 million small private plots of the members of the collectives, which the leadership did not dare carry out.

In the opinion of Abram Bergson and other Western observers, the agricultural goals adopted by the Twenty-second Party Congress as part of the program of creating a "material basis" for communism by 1980 seemed fantastically optimistic and quite unreal—an estimate that did not apply to nearly the same extent to the industrial goals. Khrushchev's frantic efforts after the Congress to bolster farm production—this time demanding the abolition of the grass rotation system in favor of planting feed crops such as sugar beets, corn, peas, and beans—served to emphasize further the crisis in Soviet agriculture. It is also probably in connection with the economic, especially the agricultural, crisis that Khrushchev enacted, in 1962, his strangest reorganizational measure: the across-the-board division of the hitherto monolithic Communist Party into two party hierarchies, one to deal with industry and the other with agriculture.

As we have mentioned, Khrushchev enthusiastically promised that communism, which was to replace socialism as the culminating phase in the evolution of Soviet society, was within reach. The Twenty-second Party Congress, in October 1961, paid much attention to this issue, proclaiming that the preconditions for communism should be established in the USSR by 1980. Although the details of communist society were somewhat vague, in general terms it was to be an economy of abundance that would satisfy all the needs of the population. "Of course, when we speak of satisfying people's needs," Khrushchev added, "we have in mind not whims or claims to luxuries, but the healthy needs of a culturally developed person." Great equality was assumed. Not only would income differentials vanish and people live according to the classic communist ideal of "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their wants," but communism would finally eliminate the inequalities between town and country, industrial and agricultural work, mental and manual labor. Members of the new society would be "broad-profile workers" that is, persons trained in two or three related skills who would, in addition,

engage without pay in one or more other socially useful occupations in their leisure hours. This was meant to approximate Karl Marx's famous description of "communist society" as one in which "nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic."

Collectivism was a defining ideal for everything. Even some of the abundant consumer goods would be available in the form of "appliance pools" of refrigerators, washing machines, or vacuum cleaners. Apparently, Khrushchev objected to the last to private automobile ownership and projected instead public car pools. On a still broader scale, life would become increasingly socialized. Free public health services and transportation would be followed, for example, by free public meals, which would virtually eliminate kitchen drudgery for women. The Academician Stanislav Strumilin and others constructed models of communal cities of the future, with parents allowed a daily visit to their children, who would live separately under the care of a professional staff. Indeed communism would seem to imply a great diminution in the role of the family, if not its abolition. By contrast, the role of the school would expand, and so would the roles of labor brigades, comrades' courts, and other public organizations.

Khrushchev's successors, we have mentioned, ended the discussion of the imminent building of communism and abandoned many of Khrushchev's "schemes." But they remained committed, if less and less effectively, to economic development. In the middle and late 1960s fundamental measures were enacted to bolster Soviet agriculture. Collective farmers finally received a guaranteed wage, which made their position comparable to that of the *sovkhoz* workers, whereas earlier they had the last claim in the distribution of gain, frequently rendering their very existence marginal. Also, pensions and social services were extended to the *kolkhoz* members. Over a period of years the state greatly increased the amount of resources devoted to agriculture so that investment in agriculture came to constitute over a third in the allocation of the total national investment. Another 4.5 percent of the national income was assigned to subsidize retail food prices, to keep these down despite heavy production costs. Still other large sums went into agricultural research. If one adds to these huge expenses some 5 billion dollars spent by the Soviet Union in 1975-76 alone to buy grain abroad, more money to buy meat and butter, as well as similar huge purchases later, one can get an idea of the enormous effort mounted by the Soviet leadership to develop the agricultural sector and to supply the Soviet public with increasing amounts of food at more or less stable prices but also the generally miserable condition of Soviet agriculture.

The new Five-Year Plan, 1966-70—eventually designated as the Eighth—presented by Kosygin to the Twenty-third Party Congress in the spring of 1966, reset a number of Khrushchev's economic goals from 1965 to 1970. The economy

was to strive for a 49-52 percent increase in the output of heavy industry and a 43-46 percent increase in consumer goods, with the annual growth rate of 85 percent and 77 percent, respectively—a very high figure for consumer goods in relation to heavy industry, although in line with Khrushchev's thought on the matter on the eve of his fall. Subsequently the Soviet government signed contracts with Italian and French companies to help develop the automobile industry in the Soviet Union.

The Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Five-Year Plans, covering the years from 1966 to 1980, testify to the slowdown of the Soviet economy, accentuated by disastrous crop failures in 1972 and especially 1975, which necessitated massive purchases of grain abroad. Western economists reported that the plans' targets were "generally—sometimes widely—missed, affected as the USSR has been by declining reserves of labor and other retardational forces," and successive plans tended to set lower targets, also often not reached. Almost every area fell far short of expectations: agriculture, consumer goods, civilian equipment, capital formation, and labor productivity. Only Soviet heavy industries and military production seemed to grow at high rates. Despite these problems, Alexander Dallin observed in 1977, "no liberalizing reforms seem to be in the offing; rather, there is strong emphasis on centralism in planning and management, with further mergers of enterprises into rather large units and computerization. Still, the industrial basis of Soviet power—including military might—will certainly continue to grow at a pace that would be creditable for any advanced industrial power."

Since the fall of Khrushchev and in general since the death of Stalin, the standard of living of the urban, and especially of the poverty-stricken rural, population apparently continued to improve. During the 1960s and 1970s, wages and salaries steadily increased (and there was little inflation), food supplies improved, the amount and variety of consumer goods grew, and new housing continued to be built. Additional needs could often be satisfied in the growing "second economy" (the "black market" or "unofficial economy"), where one could purchase foreign products, illegally (i.e., privately) manufactured goods, scarce Soviet goods purchased legally and then resold, goods obtained illegally (for example, by truck drivers or by store managers), and services. As the economy began to falter in the 1970s and early 1980s, however, these improvements slowed. At the same time, the Soviet Union was bearing very heavy military expenditures, exemplified by the deployment of antimissile ballistic systems and by the tremendous growth of the Soviet navy. Economic activities in the USSR spread out, and the economic map of the country underwent constant change. Illustrations of this change include the rise of Novosibirsk as a great scientific and technological center in Siberia, the Bratsk Dam, the Baikal-Amur mainline railway, the new problem of the industrial pollution of Lake Baikal, and the shift in the center of oil production since the Second World War from its long-time location in the Caucasus to new fields between the Volga and the Urals, and also to oil and natural gas fields beyond the Urals.

The new leadership also resorted to economic reform, described generally as an economic "liberalization" and associated with the name of a Kharkov economist, Evsei Liberman. Faced with an economic slowdown, characterized by a drop in the growth rate of the gross national product and by a marked decline in the return on investment and in the growth of productivity of labor as well as by a great loss accruing from an underutilization of capital and labor resources, the government decided to shift the emphasis and the incentives from the sheer volume of production, where they had been from the inauguration of the First Five-Year Plan, to sales and profits. Under the new system managerial bonuses were to depend, not on output as such, but on sales and profits, the latter factor finally giving serious recognition to the element of cost in Soviet production. In January 1966 forty-three enterprises from seventeen industries, with a total of 300,000 workers, were switched to the new system. Others followed in subsequent months and years. Some economic reform was realized in industry, transportation, and retail trade, and it spread to the sovkhozes and to the construction sector. Yet, ambivalent and probably insufficient to begin with, it was enmeshed in the process of implementation, with the result that there proved to be very little difference between the new system and the old system. More prominent was the new emphasis on material incentives, on the provision of more and more differentiated rewards. However, although widely applied, these incentives did not lead to an important improvement in performance.

Indeed, the Tenth Five-Year Plan, 1976-80, and the Eleventh that succeeded it, although on the whole less ambitious than their predecessors, witnessed repeated inability of the Soviet economy to meet set goals, a decline in the increase of labor productivity, and other signs of stagnation. Some specialists considered 1979, the first of the unprecedented four successive years of bad grain harvests, a disastrous turning point. Then and in the years immediately following, seemingly everything, from transportation bottlenecks and difficulty in maintaining the supply of energy to ever-increasing alcoholism and inflation, combined to retard Soviet economic development and to emphasize the seriousness of Soviet economic problems. Other observers wrote more generally of the first successful period of the Brezhnev regime, when the growth of Soviet military and industrial might went hand in hand with a sharp rise in living standards, and of the last stagnant and disappointing years with their ubiquitous shortages of food and consumer goods.

An economic assessment of the development of the Soviet economy under Brezhnev's stewardship, from 1964 to 1982, written at the time of his death, described the following conditions, in comparison with the United States. On the one hand, there was

Steady growth of aggregate output over the eighteen-year period, averaging 3.8 percent per year, with industrial output growing at an average annual rate of 4.9 percent.

Steady increase in living standards of the Soviet population, with per capita consumption rising at an average annual rate of 2.7 percent.

Significant growth in Soviet military power in absolute terms as well as in relative terms vis-à-vis the United States.

Reduction of the gap in aggregate and per capita output (GNP) between the Soviet Union and the United States. Whereas in 1965 Soviet GNP was only about 46 percent that of the United States (38 percent on a per capita basis), by 1982 it was 55 percent (47 percent on a per capita basis).

Reduction of the gap in productivity between the Soviet Union and the United States. While in 1965 the productivity of an average Soviet worker was only 30 percent that in the United States, by 1982 it was 41 percent.

Increase in the output of major industrial commodities to the point where, at the beginning of the 1980s, the physical output of many key commodities in the Soviet Union equaled or exceeded that of the United States.

On the other hand, there also was

Steady deceleration in the growth of the Soviet economy. The average annual growth of GNP declined from the peak of 5.2 percent during 1966-70 to 3.7 percent during 1971-75, to 2.7 percent during 1976-80, and to an estimated 2.0 percent during 1981-82.

Steady deceleration in the growth of living standards, with the average annual growth of per capita consumption declining from a peak of 4.3 percent during 1966-70 to 2.6 percent during 1971-75, to 1.7 percent during 1976-80, and to an estimated 1.2 percent during 1981-82.

Failure to achieve satisfactory growth in Soviet agriculture. Over the eighteen-year period the average growth rate of GNP originating in agriculture amounted to only 1.7 percent.

Lack of growth of agricultural productivity both in absolute terms and in relative terms vis-à-vis the United States. While in 1965 the productivity of an average Soviet farm worker was only 14 percent that in the United States (in the Soviet Union one worker supplied six persons; in the United States one worker supplied forty-three persons), by 1981 it actually declined to a mere 12 percent (in the Soviet Union one worker supplied eight people; in the United States the corresponding figure was sixty-five).

Although a significant effect of long-term weather cycles on grain output in the Soviet Union cannot be ruled out, the most significant failure of the Brezhnev era appears to be grain harvests, which after 1972 repeatedly fell far short of expectations and needs.... The Brezhnev reign was characterized by the highest priority being given to the growth of investment and defense spending except during the period 1964-70. As a result, the per capita consumption of an average Soviet citizen today is still not much more than one-third that in the United States.

But while the facts and the statistics seemed reasonably reliable, explanations of them differed. Possibly the most important issue was to what extent Soviet economic difficulties were of a temporary and relatively remediable character and to what extent they were intrinsic to the system.

"The Thaw"

Khrushchev's "secret speech" to the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 was the most dramatic gesture in the process of de-Stalinization of Soviet life—though it was also, as noted, part of the struggle for power within the party

leadership. One thing was clear to Stalin's successors: they could not rule as he had—if only because they lacked his charisma (and perhaps his ruthlessness) but also because the Soviet people were expecting so much more. For the system to survive, it needed to be more responsive to the needs and wishes of the population. This was especially evident, as we have seen, in economic policies, which paid much more attention than in the past to raising the material standard of living. The renunciation of terror was another essential step away from the past. Stalin's death and especially Beria's fall in the summer of 1953 resulted in a considerable diminution in the role and power of the political police. Immediate steps were taken to assure the population, and especially the party, that terror would no longer be part of the Soviet system of rule. The "doctors' plot" was declared to be a fabrication. New regulations and supervisory structures limited the autonomy of the political police. Immediate work began on a new legal code, promulgated in 1958, which offered citizens more legal protections. And of course, Khrushchev's 1956 speech openly castigated the state's security apparatus for mistakes and crimes, leading to the posthumous vindication ("rehabilitation" in the language of the time) of some of its most prominent victims. Living victims benefited as well. Thousands, perhaps millions, of political prisoners were released from the notorious Gulag of forced labor camps. Still, dissent was not tolerated. It seems that Soviet citizens gradually lost the immediate and all-pervasive dread of the political police that they had acquired under Stalin. But, although milder, the Soviet Union remained a police state.

As we shall see in a later chapter, Stalin's death was also followed by some relaxation of party control in the field of culture. Khrushchev's denunciation of the late dictator in itself suggested the need for a thorough reevaluation of a great many former assumptions and assertions. It also created much confusion. For a number of months in 1956 some Soviet writers exercised remarkable freedom in their approach to Soviet reality and their criticism of it. But, after the Polish crisis and the Hungarian uprising in the autumn of that year, restrictions reappeared. Khrushchev's successors assumed a much harder line against dissent, as illustrated by the arrest, trial, and sentencing of Andrei Sinitsky and Iulii Daniel in 1965–66 and numerous other instances of cultural suppression.

The amount of covert opposition and bitterness that this control and the Soviet system in general created can only be surmised. Yet it should be noted that uprisings against Communist regimes took place not only in East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, but also in the USSR itself, mainly to protest food shortages, price increases, and other changes in living and working conditions, though protests also often revealed deep resentment of state officials and of the larger conditions of Soviet life. These included uprisings in the Vorkuta and Kengir forced-labor camps in 1953 and 1954; nationalist protests in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, in 1956; protests by Russian construction workers in Temirtau in Kazakhstan in 1959; and a workers' uprising in Novocherkassk in 1962. Sporadic riots, strikes, and student

demonstrations also occurred in later years. The government invariably responded to these protests with severe repression.

The thawing of Soviet society and the emerging of opposition views gave rise to blossoming of a striking and varied *samizdat*, that is, self-published, illegally produced, reproduced, and distributed literature, and to the appearance of dissenting intellectuals and even groups of intellectuals on the fringes of official cultural life. Numerous dissident groups and trends emerged in these years: religious study-prayer groups (Orthodox, Protestant, Jewish, Buddhist, and others), nonconformist artists displaying their works in private apartments, dissident poets and songwriters, feminists, liberals, socialists, and anarchists. Harassed and suppressed in many ways, including on occasion incarceration in dreadful mental hospitals, the opposition nevertheless kept delivering its message, or rather messages, ranging from a kind of conservative nationalism and neo-Slavophilism to former hydrogen-bomb physicist, the late Andrei Sakharov's, progressive, generally Westernized, views and the late Andrei Amalrik's personal, catastrophic, almost Chaadaev-like vision, to the dissident Marxism of Roy Medvedev. And it produced the phenomenon of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Whatever one thinks of that writer in terms of literary stature, ideological acumen, or scholarly precision, most of his works, especially the *Gulag* volumes, are likely to be linked as indissolubly to the way we remember the Russia of Stalin as Pushkin's *Engene Onegin* and Turgenev's *Gentry Nest* have been linked to the Russia of the landed gentry. Isolated, weak, armed only with a belief in individual moral regeneration, the intellectual opposition remained a highly troublesome element in Soviet society but also a sign of the complexity of that society and of its own sources for change.

Jewish self-affirmation, protest, and massive migration to Israel (about 235,000 emigrants up to 1985, some 10 percent of the total Jewish population of the USSR, with many more applying)—together with the permitted emigration of some non-Jews—represented another development to disturb the post-Stalin Soviet scene, a development closely linked to the intellectual opposition, although also quite distinct. One suspects that the decision to let numerous dissatisfied Soviet citizens leave, while solving the immediate problem of dealing with those people as well as responding in a conciliatory way to world public opinion, potentially raised more questions for the Soviet system than it settled. Complete alienation from the established order among Soviet Jews cannot be explained by deep Jewish identity, widespread anti-Semitism, or Zionism: most Soviet Jews were quite assimilated and even relatively successful. Their alienation from Soviet society was little different from their non-Jewish fellow citizens. The main difference was their opportunity to leave. A Soviet joke heard in the early 1980s is suggestive: While swimming in the Black Sea Brezhnev begins to drown. A strong Soviet woman grabs him and brings him to shore. "You have saved my life, comrade. I am a powerful man. What wish can I grant you?" She answers: "Open the borders of the Soviet Union and let all the peace-loving progressive people of the world who love the USSR enter and all the anti-Soviet elements leave."

Brezhnev pauses and then laughs, "I understand you, dearest, you just want to be alone with me."

The post-Stalin relaxation of restrictions appeared especially striking in an area that spans domestic and foreign policies: foreign travel and international contacts in general. Modifying the former Draconian regulations, which had made a virtually impenetrable "iron curtain" between the Soviet people and the outside world, Soviet authorities began to welcome tourists, including Americans, and allow increasing numbers of their citizens to travel abroad. Always strong on organization, they proceeded to arrange numerous "cultural exchanges," ranging from advanced study in many fields of learning to motion pictures and books for children. Soviet scientists, scholars, athletes, dancers, and musicians, not to mention the astronauts, drew deserved attention in many countries of the world. At the same time Soviet citizens welcomed distinguished visitors from the West and vigorously applauded their performances. In 1976, following the Helsinki agreements of the preceding year, foreign travel and cultural exchange gained further strength, supplying the USSR with more international contacts than had been the case at any time since the discontinuation of NEP. Bit by bit, Soviet citizens were becoming better acquainted with the West and the world.

Foreign Relations and the Cold War

Soviet foreign policy became much more nuanced and complex after Stalin's death. The simple view of the world as filled with enemies was replaced, in Ted Hopf's words, "by a continuum of difference" that recognized a wide range of different interests and positions among nations, but also by recognition that some difference was not harmful to the Soviet Union. This led to greater tolerance of divergence within the Communist bloc—though only to a point—and to the new dogma that the capitalist and socialist worlds could coexist and resolve their differences without war. In the nuclear age, of course, *détente* was a quite rational policy. At the same time, beside this greater flexibility and tolerance—reflecting also greater self-confidence and security—were important perspectives on foreign relations that reflected a persistent Stalinist approach, which would lead to new conflicts. The Soviet Union viewed itself, with good cause, as a "great power" with its own sphere of influence and interests. Indeed, the Soviet Union hoped to expand this sphere by fomenting socialist revolutions in other countries, which hopefully would bring them new allies. To be sure, as the evidence of relations with eastern Europe, China, and the revolutionary movements of the Third World show, but also Moscow's relations with the national republics of the USSR, these comrades were not equals: the Soviet Union must stand at the commanding apex of this international movement. Still, this domination was handled, most of the time, with far more subtlety and effectiveness than in the past.

Stalin's death and Malenkov's assumption of the leading role in the Soviet Union immediately marked some lessening of international tensions as well as some relaxation at home. The new prime minister asserted that

all disputed questions in foreign relations could be settled peacefully, signaling out the United States as a country with which an understanding could be reached. In the summer of 1953 an armistice was finally agreed upon in Korea. In the spring of 1954 an international conference ended the war in Indo-China by partitioning it between the Communist Vietnam in the north and the independent state of Vietnam in the south. Although the Soviet Union had not participated directly in the Indo-Chinese conflict, that local war had threatened to become a wider conflagration, and its termination enhanced the chances of world peace. In January 1954, the Council of Foreign Ministers of the four powers, inoperative for a long time, met in Berlin to discuss the German and Austrian treaties, but without result. The Soviet Union joined the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO, and the International Labor Organization, or ILO, that April. Malenkov spoke of a further improvement of international relations and of a summit meeting.

That a policy of even moderate relaxation had its dangers for the Soviet bloc became, however, quickly apparent. In early June 1953, demonstrations and strikes erupted in Czechoslovakia, assuming a dangerous form in Pilsen—or Plzeň—where rioters seized the city hall and demanded free elections. In the middle of the month East Berlin and other centers in East Germany rose in a rebellion spearheaded by workers who proclaimed a general strike. Soviet troops reestablished order after some bitter fighting. Beria's fall that summer might have been affected by these developments, for the police chief had stressed relaxation and legality since the death of Stalin. Malenkov's resignation from the premiership in February 1955 ended the role of that former favorite of Stalin on the world scene.

Bulganin, who replaced Malenkov as head of the government, became the most prominent Soviet figure in international affairs, although he usually traveled in the company of and acted jointly with the party chief, Khrushchev. Molotov, in the meantime, continued in charge of the foreign office. "B. and K." diplomacy, as it came to be known, included much showy journeying on goodwill missions in both Europe and Asia. The Soviet Union paid special court to India and other neutralist countries, which had formerly been condemned as lackeys of imperialism. At the same time the two Soviet leaders claimed to be ready to settle the points at issue with the United States and the West. And, indeed, in May 1955 the great powers managed to come to an agreement and conclude a peace treaty with Austria, which included the permanent neutralization of that state as well as certain Austrian payments and deliveries to the USSR in recompense for the Soviet return of German property in Austria to the Austrian government. The height of the *détente* was reached at the summit conference in Geneva in July 1955. While no concrete problems were solved at that meeting, the discussion took place in a remarkably cordial atmosphere, with both Bulganin and Eisenhower insisting that their countries would never engage in aggressive action. The following month Soviet authorities announced a reduction of their armed forces by 640,000 men. In September the USSR returned the Porkkala base to Finland and concluded a

treaty of friendship with the Finns for twenty years, yet in the autumn of 1955, as soon as the ministers of foreign affairs tried to apply the attitude of accommodation and understanding expressed by their chiefs to the settlement of specific issues, a deadlock resulted, with Molotov not budging an inch from the previous Soviet positions and demands. The "spirit of Geneva" proved to be an enticing dream rather than a reality.

Since the *rapprochement* between the USSR and the West failed to last, the polarization of the world continued. Following the Communist victory in northern Indo-China, the Manila pact of September 1954 created the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, or SEATO. Great Britain, France, Pakistan, and Thailand joined the four countries already allied, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines, to establish a new barrier to Communist expansion in Asia. In Europe, West Germany rose steadily in importance as an American ally and a member of the Western coalition. The Soviet Union in its turn concluded the so-called Warsaw Treaty with its satellites in May 1955 to unify the Communist military command in Europe.

The year 1956 was a remarkable one, especially in eastern Europe. The first sign of a new policy toward the rest of the socialist world came when Khrushchev, Bulganin, and a large delegation visited Belgrade to essentially admit Stalin's mistakes in his intolerance of Tito and the Yugoslav path. As long as Belgrade accepted its status as a younger brother to the Soviet Union—though this would become a source of tension—Moscow would tolerate their different approach to socialist construction. In April 1956, the Cominform was dissolved, and Molotov, who had opposed these softer policies, was replaced as foreign minister by Shepilov. Khrushchev's not-so-secret speech in February 1956, which was summarized or even read at meetings of Communists in eastern Europe, was a particular stimulus of trouble. Moscow's recognition of Stalin's errors and crimes seemed to authorize demands for systemic reform. Political explosions in Poland and Hungary reflected these rapidly changing conditions.

In Poland, in late June 1956, workers took to the streets in the city of Poznan. When Polish troops were sent against them, scores of people were killed. At the same time, Polish intellectuals were calling for a relaxation of controls. The Communist Party in Poland was itself divided, with many Communists favoring a distinctive Polish path to socialism. In October, Wladyslaw Gomulka, who had been imprisoned as a "reactionary," was reinstated as party secretary, and Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders flew to Warsaw to settle the crisis. In spite of extreme tension—Khrushchev called the Poles traitors and Gomulka blamed Khrushchev for his imprisonment—an understanding was reached: the USSR accepted Gomulka and a liberalization of the Communist system in Poland and agreed to withdraw Soviet military advisors from the country. The day after the Soviet leaders left, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in Warsaw in support of Gomulka.

Hungary went further. As Hopf observed, "Poland had just misread violating the boundaries of permissible difference; Hungary would not." Partly influenced by the events in Poland, a revolution broke out in late October 1956,

After the Twentieth Party Congress, Hungarian demonstrators demanded reform and the return to power of the reformist prime minister Imre Nagy, who had been forced out of the party and the government in 1955 by the Stalinist party leader, Matyas Rakosi. In July, Moscow sent Mikoyan, a supporter of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization, to Budapest to remove Rakosi. By October, inspired by the events in Poland, demonstrators in the streets, mostly students, were demanding the restoration of Nagy to power, the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country, complete freedom of speech, and democratic elections. Nagy was restored, but the demonstrations continued and grew increasingly violent as students encountered security forces and the military. At the end of October, Nagy formed a coalition government that included non-Communists and began negotiations to withdraw Hungary from the Warsaw Pact. The Soviet leadership, memoirs and archival documents show, were frightened of the implications of showing "weakness" in the face of such disorder and disloyalty. This could spread through the whole region—indeed, there were signs it was already spreading—and give opportunity to the Western powers. Mikoyan reported from Budapest that the Hungarian army could not be relied upon to restore order. The Soviet leaders decided to send troops to crush the rebellion. On November 4, Soviet tanks and troops began their assault on Budapest, the center of the rebellion. Witnesses describe great brutality as soldiers attacked anyone on the streets and tanks fired at buildings. It is estimated that over 2,500 Hungarians and 722 Soviet troops were killed in the fighting. Nagy was arrested and would be executed in 1958. Although the Western powers were reluctant to intervene, the moral shock of the Hungarian intervention stimulated Western hostility toward the Soviet Union. It also led to a crisis among Western Communists: the revelations after 1953 along with the violent repression of the Communist reform movement in Hungary encouraged movements for change within many parties but also led large numbers of individual Communists to quit the movement altogether.

Khrushchev's behavior on the international scene showed a certain pattern. He remained essentially intransigent, pushing every advantage he had, be it troubles in newly independent states, such as the Congo, or Soviet achievements in armaments and space technology. Nevertheless, he talked incessantly in favor of coexistence and summit conferences to settle outstanding issues. Also, he paid friendly visits to many countries, including the United States in 1959. The summit conference in the summer of 1960 was never held, for two weeks before it was scheduled to begin Khrushchev announced that an American U-2 spy plane had been brought down deep in Soviet territory. But in 1961 Khrushchev met the new American president, John F. Kennedy, in Vienna. In the summer of 1962 both aspects of Soviet foreign policy stood in bold relief: fanned by the USSR, a new Berlin crisis continued to threaten world peace; yet, on the other hand, Khrushchev emphasized more than ever coexistence abroad and peaceful progress at home, having made that his signal theoretical contribution to the program that was enunciated at the Twentieth Party Congress. To be sure, as officially defined in the Soviet Union, coexistence meant economic, political, and ideological competition with the

capitalist world until the final fall of capitalism. But that fall, Soviet authorities came to assert, would occur without a world war.

In the autumn of that same year, however, Khrushchev overreached himself and brought the world to the brink of a thermonuclear war. The confrontation between the United States and the USSR in October 1962 over the Soviet missiles in Cuba, which resulted in a stunning Soviet defeat, can be explained, at least in part, by the Soviet leader's enthusiasm and his conviction that the United States and capitalism in general were on the decline and would retreat when hard pressed. The outcome, no doubt, strengthened the argument for peaceful coexistence and emphasized caution and consultation in foreign policy, symbolized by the celebrated "hot line" between Washington and Moscow.

The Soviet Union proceeded to measure carefully its reactions and its involvement even in such complicated and entangling crises as the Israeli-Arab wars of 1967 and 1973 and the Vietnam War. In the latter conflict, the Soviet Union denounced "American imperialism" and provided extremely valuable materiel to North Vietnam, but it avoided escalation. Yet, following the complete victory of communism in Indo-China in 1975 and the shattering impact of the catastrophic American policy in Vietnam on the American public, the Soviet Union might have felt that it had a freer hand on the international stage, in Angola or elsewhere.

With the Soviet Union as well as the United States acquiring a second-strike capability, that is, the ability to retaliate and inflict "unacceptable damage" on the enemy after absorbing a nuclear blow, a true balance of terror settled on the world. Ever-improving technology made virtually all established strategic concepts obsolete. Numerous bases and indeed whole sections of the globe lost their importance in terms of the possible ultimate showdown between the two nuclear giants.

From the mid-1970s it was authoritatively estimated in the West that the USSR had caught up with the United States in overall nuclear military strength, and indeed had perhaps moved slightly ahead; on the other hand, evidence available since 1991 has led some specialists to conclude that these estimates were based on successful Soviet efforts to exaggerate the size and effectiveness of their forces. Yet the enormous economic burden, terror, and inconclusiveness of the arms race did not lead to a full negotiated settlement. Important results were achieved, to be sure. Following the earlier banning of nuclear tests in the atmosphere, the nuclear nonproliferation agreement was signed by the two superpowers and other states in early 1968. Other agreements were reached concerning outer space, where 1975 witnessed the celebrated joint effort of the Russians and the Americans. The crucial issue of military limitations itself was tackled in numerous negotiations, but these remained inconclusive. Moreover, as Edward Teller and other scientists have pointed out, the difficulty in the negotiations resided not only in the entire complex of aims, attitudes, and policies of the two superpowers, but also in the very nature of scientific and technological advance, which rapidly makes prearranged schemes of limitation obsolete.

The very closely related but even larger issue of détente between the Soviet Union and the United States also sailed to an uncertain future. Détente scored a resounding success at the Helsinki conference in the summer of 1975, where the United States and other Western countries accepted in effect the Communist redrawing of the map of central and eastern Europe following the Second World War in exchange for unsubstantiated promises of greater contacts between the two worlds and a greater degree of freedom in those contacts. But a comprehensive economic agreement between the USSR and the United States failed over the questions of the most favored nation clause, credits, and the American concern with the fate of Soviet Jews. Furthermore, before long détente was again swamped by new international developments, to be detailed later in this chapter.

Ironically, while Soviet-American relations improved and became more stable after the Cuban confrontation, and while the Soviet leaders found welcome in Gaullist France and other capitalist countries, their standing in the Communist world deteriorated. The conflict with China broke out into the open around 1960 and widened and deepened thereafter. After the abrupt withdrawal of Soviet personnel from China in August of that year and the discontinuance of assistance, relations between the two countries quickly became extremely antagonistic. To the sound of violent mutual denunciations the two states and parties competed with each other for the leadership of world communism, the Chinese usually championing their revolutionary position against Soviet "revisionism." Moreover, China became an atomic power and formulated large claims on Soviet Asian territory. Observers noted that international crises such as the war in Vietnam only intensified the hostility between the two great Communist states. Although China remained far behind the USSR in industrial and technological development and although it was fully preoccupied with a "cultural revolution," its aftermath, and other internal problems, it was still viewed as posing a major threat to the Soviet Union in the future, if not in the immediate present.

Problems in eastern Europe proved to be more pressing. The twelve years that followed the suppression of the Hungarian revolution witnessed Soviet attempts to adjust to changing times, to allow for a Communist pluralism with a considerable measure of institutional and eventually even ideological diversity. In Zbigniew Brzezinski's phrase, satellites were to become junior allies. Even Tito usually received a kind of fraternal recognition, and he spoke with authority. Yet tensions persisted and indeed increased, both between the different East European countries and the Soviet Union and within those countries as most of them proceeded with de-Stalinization, economic liberalization, and other important changes. The break with China led in 1961 to the unexpected departure of Albania into "the Chinese camp." Romania under its new leader, Nicolae Ceausescu, showed a remarkable, even stunning, independence from the Soviet Union, although it remained barely within the Communist bloc and continued a hard-line policy at home. Poland, belying the promise of 1956, had its progress toward freedom arrested, and concentrated its energy on trying to contain, by petty and peripatent persecution, the

Catholic Church, liberal intellectuals and students, and other forces favoring change.

Then came the "Prague Spring" of 1968 and another armed intervention by Soviet troops into a "fraternal" socialist country. In the years before 1968, there was a growing desire among Czechoslovak intellectuals and reformist party members for more rapid de-Stalinization and reform. After a visit to Prague at the end of 1967, Brezhnev supported removing the unpopular party leader Antonin Novotny, who was replaced by a representative of the reformist wing of the party, Alexander Dubček. Dubček announced a dramatic program of change that included freedom of the press, reducing the power of the political police, greater market freedom in the economy, and, after a transition period, free elections. Immediately, relatively free discussion was allowed in the press. These reforms, confirmed and extended at a party congress, led to consternation in the governing circles of the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, and Bulgaria. The Soviet leaders tried to limit the reforms, and an unprecedented face-to-face discussion between the members of the Politburos of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia seemed to resolve the conflict. Then on August 20, Soviet troops, assisted by the troops of Warsaw Pact allies, invaded Czechoslovakia with half a million soldiers and occupied the country.

By now it was clear that the Soviet Union was determined to insist on the control of dissent, maintenance of a planned economy, and subordination to the Soviet Union. The Czech invasion was justified as an act of "socialist internationalism" necessary to prevent "capitalist restoration." In time, this implied policy became known as the "Brezhnev Doctrine": the socialist community led by the USSR has a duty and right to intervene where and when, as Brezhnev put it in a speech in Warsaw in November 1968, "internal and external forces that are hostile to socialism try to turn the development of some socialist country towards the restoration of a capitalist regime." The repercussions of the intervention lasted long after the summer of 1968 and not only in the emergence of the Brezhnev doctrine. Still more European socialists turned away from the Soviet Union after 1968 and the Western powers grew increasingly wary.

It may have been in Poland, though, that evidence of a crisis in the Communist world—including economic stagnation, social discontent, political alienation, and resentment of Soviet domination—pointed most strongly toward the eventual collapse of Soviet power in eastern Europe. In the late 1970s, after dissident intellectuals offered support to striking workers, a unique alliance of workers and intellectuals emerged that would become a major threat to Communist power in Poland and beyond. Indeed, it has been argued that this movement, out of which the "Solidarity" trade union would emerge, was the beginning of the end of Communist rule in eastern Europe. Already in the 1970s, a growing underground of labor and dissident organizations and publications began to develop. This movement was given a boost in 1978 when the Archbishop of Cracow, Karol

Wojtyła, was elected to the papal throne as Pope John Paul II. His visit to Poland a year later has been described by participants as a brief national festival of liberation. His public masses were attended by millions (and the government and police dared not interfere). He spoke openly of the need for human rights and national and religious freedom. His spiritual and moral stature as Pope and his support for change inspired many Poles. The movement continued to grow. The government hesitated to suppress the opposition, in part at least, because of Poland's heavy dependence on continuing Western loans, which were required to keep the troubled economy solvent.

In the wake of a massive and successful strike of workers at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, supported by dissident intellectuals and other worker groups, a nationwide independent labor union calling itself "Solidarity" was established, led by the electrician and labor activist Lech Wałęsa. Very quickly, Solidarity took the form of a social movement seeking fundamental change. Its stated goals were not only economic improvements in the lives of workers but also "justice, democracy, truth, legality, human dignity, freedom of convictions, and the repair of the republic." In their view, economic protest was "social protest" and social protest was "moral protest." The government was effectively losing control of the situation—one sign of which were the thousands of opposition publications being printed without censorship. The Soviet leadership could not tolerate this threat. But rather than an invasion, a military coup was planned, for this time Moscow had reliable allies able to command a strong armed force. The coup took place, in close cooperation with the Soviet authorities, on December 13, 1981. Its leader, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, had been given increasing authority in the preceding months; at this point he was simultaneously minister of defense, prime minister, and first secretary of the party. He declared martial law, created a ruling Military Council of National Salvation, arrested Solidarity's leaders and supporters, and expanded censorship.

Active resistance against the overwhelming force of the regime was quite limited, and, from a military standpoint, the operation was carried out rather effectively. Nevertheless, the "success" of General Jaruzelski's junta was very dubious. Although thousands of Solidarity activists, including Wałęsa and other dissidents, were arrested and placed in internment camps, some leaders of the movement escaped arrest and an underground opposition began to form. Western economic sanctions and continuing passive resistance to the regime in the factories, offices, schools, and universities were making the task of running the country extremely difficult for the Jaruzelski regime. By the end of 1982, there appeared to be two clear choices before the military government of Poland: either to continue with the martial law administration, further alienating the population and risking a total economic collapse of the country, or to end martial law and attempt to open the few remaining channels of contact with the great majority of the Polish population in an effort to reduce tensions and improve the performance of the economy. The choice

was not an easy one for the Polish Communist authorities—and their Soviet sponsors.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late December 1979 may have been the most damaging decision of the Brezhnev era, both for the Soviet Union's international reputation and for the Soviet system itself. The invasion was in support of a Communist government in Afghanistan that had overthrown a military dictator in 1978 and embarked on a series of social reforms, including collectivization of agriculture, unveiling and educating women, and attacking influential religious leaders. These radical measures stimulated an Islamic rebellion that threatened the Afghan government but also, when viewed alongside the 1979 revolution in Iran, raised the specter of Islamic uprisings in Central Asia and elsewhere in the Soviet Union. The Afghan government repeatedly asked for Soviet military support. By contrast, in much international opinion, the Afghan invasion was a sign of Soviet expansionism: it was the first direct Soviet use of military force outside "its own" eastern European empire since the Second World War, and it was interpreted as a first step in a bid for the oil of the Middle East and a general takeover of that region. In the wake of the invasion, the United States took a much harsher stance toward the Soviet Union and offered material support to the rebels. The invasion also damaged the USSR's reputation in the postcolonial world, where the image of the Soviet Union as a force for "national liberation" was being eclipsed by evidence of Soviet "imperialism." Perhaps even more important, the war was damaging domestically. The brutal ten-year war became a "bleeding wound," as Gorbachev would call it before ending the war in failure in 1989. Unable to defeat the mujahideen rebels, who enjoyed much popular support and operated on rugged lands they knew well, Soviet losses were enormous. About 14,000 soldiers died during the war and a great many more were wounded and disabled. The war was also psychologically devastating: many returning Afghan veterans suffered from mental illness and drug addiction.

As of 1985, tension between the Soviet Union and the United States, the East and the West, was not confined to the crucial problems of Afghanistan and Poland. Rather, the two sides opposed each other all over the world, from Central America to southern Africa, Lebanon, and Cambodia. To be sure, western European countries, in spite of strong United States objections and even sanctions against particular companies, continued to support the building of a natural-gas pipeline from western Siberia to western Europe. But they were also apparently prepared to proceed with the installation of United States middle-range missiles to counteract the already established Soviet ones, an installation most especially opposed for years by Brezhnev. The very important Soviet-American disarmament negotiations remained deadlocked. SALT II was not ratified by the United States Senate, and its future chances appeared slim, especially after the departure of Carter from the presidency. In fact, numerous critics accused the tougher anti-Soviet policies of the Reagan administration of largely precluding adjustment and agreement. Yet the administration itself and others claimed that it was

precisely this firmer approach, and especially the concurrent buildup of the United States nuclear and military might, that would force the USSR to negotiate effectively for disarmament. Indeed, the lasting and positive memories of Reagan's presidency, especially in eastern Europe, reflect a belief, not shared by most historians, that Reagan's tough stance was responsible for the collapse of communism.