

**Soviet Perestroika and Democratic  
Reconstruction in East Europe :  
A Case Study of Hungary and  
Czechoslovakia**

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**1990**

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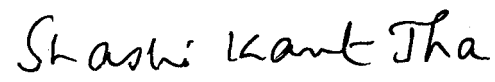
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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled  
"SOVIET PERESTROIKA AND DEMOCRATIC RECONSTRUCTION  
IN EAST EUROPE: A CASE STUDY OF HUNGARY AND  
CZECHOSLOVAKIA" submitted by Mr. Sanjoy Patnaik  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil)  
in Jawaharlal Nehru University, is a product of the  
student's own work, carried out by him under my  
supervision and guidance.

This work has not been submitted for any other  
degree of this or any other university. We recommend  
that this dissertation may be placed before the  
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(PROF. R.R.SHARMA)  
CHAIRPERSON

  
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SUPERVISOR

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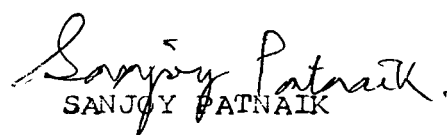
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## PREFACE

The whole of Eastern Europe in the recent past has experienced a process of enormous transformation. It has been a transformation of great magnitude in socio-economic and political fields which was an impossibility few years back. The pace of these developments has changed the political landscape of East European countries as also vastly affected every other aspect of human life.

In some of the countries of East Europe like Hungary and Czechoslovakia the recent dramatic events have behind them the history of bold and courageous reform attempts by the leadership at the political and economic level. The experiences of one country are undoubtedly different from those of others. For example, in Czechoslovakia the reform attempts invited the intervention of Warsaw Pact forces led by the Soviet Union in 1968. On the otherhand, in Hungary the reform attempts had almost an uninterrupted process of progression resulting considerable degree of economic and political liberalisation.

In the pre-perestroika period the overall question of reform in East Europe was subjected to a formidable

stiffing, i.e. an inflexible Soviet Union keen to interpret every reform attempt as a threat to socialist system from within. Conversely, behind the recent development and reform attempts in East Europe the contributory role of the Soviet Union has been equally important. In this case, a tolerant and flexible Soviet leadership took every opportunity to encourage the smaller East European countries to take the perestroika path. Additionally, the abandonment of the Brezhnev doctrine introduced favourable strategic and political elements leading to the acceleration of East European developments. Thus a happy combination of external and internal situation was created in which the East European regimes with varying degree and depending upon their approach and circumstances found a favourable opportunity as well as faced compelling pressures to react to perestroika.

Two rival schools of thought had dominated the East European communism in the sixties - a monistic conception held by Stalin's successors in the Soviet Union and others elsewhere which considered communism as one and indivisible, a single monolithic bloc tightly



bound together under Soviet leadership and a pluralistic conception which viewed communism as a 'house of many mansions', and each having its design and style. Thus two tendencies were evident - the centrifugal force of systemic pluralism and the centripetal force of bloc solidarity.

The idea of systemic pluralism was supposed to be containing two closely connected elements - (i) some degree of freedom from Soviet control for individual communist countries; and (ii) some of distinctiveness in the political systems, policies and ideologies of individual countries. Both these elements existed with a considerable degree of continuing Soviet influence and control and with persistence of certain features common to all East European countries.

The politico-economic reform experiments with greatest emphasis on democracy in East Europe and the tendency of systemic pluralism was closely connected. The distinctiveness of the urge for democratic reform was articulated in the most eloquent form in three cases - Hungary and Poland in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. At the first instance, the stimulations to these reform movements came from the 20th Communist Party of Soviet

Union (CPSU) Congress of 1956 and Khrushchev's policy of de-Stalinisation. However, the real impetus came from within the Communist party itself through steps taken by both the top leadership and by the lower and middle ranks.

In Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 there was an interweaving of action from above, in the form of new course and the reforms of the Stalinist system and action from below in the form of pressures by intellectuals, workers and party functionaries for even more drastic measures.

The evolution of reform in Czechoslovakia had its own particular character and its own distinctive fate. After the election of Alexander Dubcek to the highest post in January 1968 the party leaders set a reform course. National goals, including self-government in a federal system, thus articulating a kind of national communism was emphasised. At the international level the new leadership made proposals for a more independent foreign policy course and for some reform of bloc or to leave COMECON or the Warsaw Pact. Although the leading role of the party was to be maintained, the party was

to be substantially democratised and was to function within a pluralistic political system. As is well known this democratic construction in Czechoslovakia was frustrated by force.

On the contrary, the Hungarian experiments in reform had a less conspicuous and more sustained record. The New Economic Mechanism (NEM) started in 1968 and soon began to articulate itself on political questions also. The sum total of the argument that was advanced centred around one basic proposition - no economic reform measures could expect to attain any degree of success without a commensurate amount of political reform.

Till the advent of Gorbachev on the scene and his inauguration of perestroika the East European reform movements remained more or less a fragile process and, therefore, none of these countries could claim to have any success story to its credit. But in the age of perestroika with a Soviet leadership which is largely supportive and encouraging rather than sceptical and fear-ful the reform minded East European leadership and people have surely found a much more congenial atmosphere to pursue their programmes more vigorously. In Hungary

and Czechoslovakia this democratic vigour had been articulated in more than one way.

Many of the elements of Soviet perestroika are said to have been inspired by the reform experiments in Eastern Europe. Most specifically, they had their origin in the Hungarian and Czechoslovakia events of 1956 and 1968 respectively. A democratic system with competitive elections and enterprises with self-financing and accounting which constitute the basis of Soviet reform movement had actually their origin in the Hungarian and Czech experiments. Similarly NEM has been a major source of ideas and innovations for Gorbachev's economic reforms. In turn, the Soviet attempts of reform have given a boost to those in Hungary who argue for even more widespread changes to overcome the economic stagnation of recent years. Moreover, quite a few elements of Soviet economic reforms proposals are similar to those in Hungary, e.g., the provisions on bankruptcy of inefficient enterprises, the work place election of enterprise directors (adopted in Hungary in 1984) and joint operations with Western firms, etc. In the face of mounting foreign debt the Hungarians have used the

opportunity and stimulus provided by the Soviet reforms to launch a number of new reform movements.

In the recent past the reform movement initiated by Soviet Union have been responsible for the smooth transition to alternative governments in almost all the East European countries. Perestroika has been of great help to all the East European countries in their fight against totalitarianism. It promised democracy, what East Europe was in bare need. It would be quite relevant to enquire into this process of transformation with Soviet perestroika as the most significant factor in perspective.

In the first chapter the theoretical and historical background of perestroika has been discussed alongwith an enquiry into the Leninist concept of socialist democracy and the relation between them. The reason, course and fallout of the Hungarian reform movement of 1956 has been dealt in the second chapter. In the third chapter the history and basic principles of Czechoslovak reform experiment has been discussed. A historical and comparative analysis has been made in the fourth chapter. In the fifth and last chapter the

impact of perestroika and how it has been instrumental in bringing a major overhaul in East Europe has been examined. The method used for reaching at conclusion is historical and analytical.

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CHAPTER - I

PERESTROIKA AND SPECIALIST DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL -  
AND ENQUIRY INTO THE CONCEPT

The aim of the Marxist state consists in social equality and welfare, to which the demands for democratic decision-making and constitutional safeguards for the citizens are subordinated. The influence of socialism has transformed "bourgeois" democracy as well, and, despite the opposition of many liberals who were not prepared to concede the state any active role in the social sphere, the constitutional democratic state has developed into the welfare state.

Today "democracy" is no longer a formal concept of the theory of government but is regarded as a process which never reaches its goals, since authoritarian and non-liberal structures survive, or may revive, in every sector of the state and society. The process of democratization cannot be separated from the conditions of social change as a whole.

After nearly seventy years of socialist development the Soviet Union has failed to fulfill the promise it made i.e., providing a better standard of living. Today the Soviet Union has understood the need of a reform programme what it could not twenty five years back. The Soviet society is undergoing through enormous turmoil and faces a serious challenge to the vitality of the society. At such a crucial time, perestroika, which assures a fundamental change and democratization of the society has a pivotal role to play.



Marxist-Leninist Concept of Socialist Democracy:

A conceptual framework of state and democracy according to Marxist-Leninist theory emerges essentially from its critique of the bourgeois state and its political institutions. This framework is discussed here by focussing attention on its three interrelated components, i.e. the theory of state, democracy and representative institutions.

Marx does not subscribe to other schools of social and political thought that define state "in terms of political right or obligation or on the assumption of a common relations among all citizens and subjects...."<sup>1</sup> To him the state is a class institution except for the earliest stage in the development of society which he calls "the primitive communism", Marx believes that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles".<sup>2</sup>

According to Marx, like other forms of government, democracy in a capitalist state also serves the interest of the capitalists. "A democratic republic is", wrote Lenin, "the best possible political shell for capitalism and, therefore, once capital has gained possession of this very best shell....it establishes its power so surely,

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1. G.D.H. Cole, The Meaning of Marxism (London: MacMillan, 1948), p. 182.

2. Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto (Moscow: Progress Publishers), p. 40.

so firmly, that no change of persons, institutions or parties in the bourgeois democratic republic can shake it."<sup>3</sup> This theory suggests that the private control of the means of production is the basis of the ability of the bourgeoisie to exploit the labour and their ability to impose the dictates of their class upon the management of the political affairs of the community. Thus the political power of the capitalist class, in essence, is a particular form of economic power. There are two clear cut implications of this proposition. Firstly, it suggests that there cannot be a democracy, so long as the private economic power as the basis of political power exists. In other words, only political democracy is a bourgeois fake. Secondly, the elimination of this power will at the same time end the "exploitation of man by man" and bring about the "rule of the people".<sup>4</sup>

One of the important theoretical contributions of Lenin was his further exposition of the Marxian conception of state. Although he fully agreed with Marx on the

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3 V.I. Lenin, "What is to be Done", The State and Revolution" and "Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky", in Selected Works, 3 vols., (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973).

4 Joseph Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (London: Unwin University Books, 1966), p. 235.

essentials, he developed the idea of proletarian dictatorship in far more sharper terms.<sup>5</sup>

According to Lenin, although the state under the dictatorship of proletariat continues to be a repressive organ, it is said to be more democratic and liberal more respectful of freedom and more humane than any other previous political system. The basis of its democratic nature is that "instead of minority oppressing the majority, the majority will oppress the small group of former exploiters."<sup>6</sup> This very feature makes the proletarian democracy "a new type of democracy" which is superior to the "formal democracy" of the bourgeoisie.

"Bourgeois democracy always remains", Lenin wrote, "and under capitalism is bound to remain restricted, truncated, false and hypocritical, a paradise for the rich and snare and deception for the exploited, for the poor."<sup>7</sup> As opposed

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5 Lenin, 'The State and Revolution', no.3, pp. 253-66.

6 C.L. Wayper, Political Thought (New Delhi: B.I. Publications & Pvt. Ltd., 1974), p.207.

7 Lenin, 'Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky', n.3, p. 262.

to this, the dictatorship of the proletariat provides "the maximum of democracy for the workers and peasants".<sup>8</sup>

It is obvious that democracy and dictatorship are not to be taken to be mutually exclusive concepts. On the contrary, they are expected to go together in a harmonious manner. The state being a dictatorship in relation to certain classes can, at the same time, be a democracy for others. Lenin said, "it should be a state that is democratic in a new way (for the proletariat and propertyless in general) and dictatorial in a new way (against the bourgeoisie)".<sup>9</sup>

Thus the proletarian dictatorship is said to be profoundly democratic in character: "it is the very truth what bourgeois democracy merely pretends to be". Its strength fundamentally lies in its close connection with the masses. The proletarian democracy means transition from "formal democracy of the bourgeois republic to the actual participation of the toiling masses in the government". "The dictatorship of the proletariat inevitably brings," Lenin

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8 Lenin, Collected Works (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1957), vol.33, p. 62.

9 Lenin, The State and Revolution, n.3, p. 262.

said, "with it not only changes in the forms and institutions of democracy....but precisely those changes that lead to an unprecedented extension of the actual utilisation of democracy by those oppressed by capitalism, by the toiling class." Democracy under the proletarian state thus cannot be extended to the overthrown forces of the erstwhile bourgeoisie and all other elements fighting for the restoration of older order. Hence it is obvious that in the proletarian period the Marxist-Leninist concept of democracy lays down an appropriation of political power to be exercised by the majority of the people without allowing any share in it to the class enemies. Furthermore, it does not subscribe to the view that democracy can be achieved either through evolution or constitutional reforms.<sup>10</sup>

According to Lenin's doctrine only proletarian democracy offers a tolerable form of democracy. It too is still class rule but in his view it has "brought a development and expansion of democracy unprecedented in the world."<sup>11</sup>

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10 C.D. Kerning, ed., Marxism, Communism and Western Society: A Comparative Encyclopedia, (New York, 1972), vol.2, p. 318.

11 Lenin, n.8, vol.28, p. 246.

In The State and Revolution (1917), he still had to represent the Paris Commune as the most democratic state known to history, characterized by the "abolition of the standing army", and with all officials to be elected and subject to recall". A year later he was not yet able to claim these achievements for the Soviet state but it now seemed to him that the Soviet democracy was the "most democratic state in history".

There are two stages in socialist democracy, according to the Soviet doctrine: in the first stage it is purely proletarian and in the second stage it embraces the whole nation. Only socialist democracy-Max Adler called it "social democracy" as opposed to political democracy - ushers in that rule by the people which according to Marxist doctrine is impossible in capitalism. In proletarian democracy, where according to Stalin the classes are "non-antagonistic", majority rule also ceases to be repressive. In the Marxist doctrine it no longer means one class interest predominating over another, majority rule becomes a decision touching the realization of a common interest of the people, who are by this time allegedly socially united.

Majority rule, then, is not held a priori to be democratic: the dictatorship of a minority which resists the oppression of a class may be more democratic than the

rule of a majority in a bourgeois state. Furthermore, many Marxists deny that the bourgeoisie are really in the majority in a parliamentary democracy. They assume that the bourgeoisie has created this majority by trickery and pressure - by undemocratic electoral systems, bribery of workers (e.g. the labour aristocracy) and the exploitation of the dependent sections of the proletariat which are not yet class-conscious.

Soviet democracy is considered to be a higher form of democracy compared with the "pseudo-democratic" bourgeois state. In the former the capitalists are expropriated and eliminated, their power is broken. Thus social democracy become a reality. There are still various classes but they are not hostile to one another; and the state has therefore lost its function as an oppressor in the service of one class. The social fundamental rights which strengthen democracy are - in theory - further elaborated than in Western democracies (Art. 119 and 120 of the Soviet Constitution 1936). Marxist political theory also affirms with satisfaction that the socialist countries have fulfilled all the requirements of constitutionalism: a democratic representative system, free elections by secret ballot, fundamental rights and even federalism.

I. Perestroika and its historical and theoretical background:

Every society has to resolve its conflicts and contradictions and the developments or decay of a society is contingent upon the human beings capacities to correctly perceive the nature of concrete reality and identify appropriate solutions. Soviet Union is currently involved in a struggle for socialist democratic renewal. Socialist Revolution in Soviet Union has achieved many social goals and the Soviet society is determined to achieve new goals by following the road of socialism. Soviet society is involved in a critical assessment of its past achievements and it is trying to find out ways and means to regenerate and renew socialist development. It must be stated very clearly, that the struggle for socialist renewal has emerged from within the socialists. The goal of socialist renewal is to defend socialist achievements, to purge society of negative factors and to advance the frontiers of socialism.

Mikhail Gorbachev has summed up the goals of socialist democratic renewal and these goals will be achieved through perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness). The theoretical basis of Gorbachev's goal of socialist renewal is derived from Marxism.



Marxism is based on the theory of dialectical materialism in which transformation of material basis or foundations of society lead to changes and adjustments of the superstructure. It is also recognised in Marxism that political reforms may be a prerequisite to economic transformation. Politics is central to Marxism and socialist renewal under Gorbachev is based on Marxist theory and practice of linking politics with economics. The goals of socialist renewal in Soviet Union are many but it is recognised that economic goals cannot be achieved without changing some important aspects of politics. Hence the emphasis is on political reforms. The struggle for socialist renewal in Soviet Union has two interrelated aspects. First, the Soviet society is identifying the negative aspects in politics. Second, the Soviet leadership is involved in creating new institutional basis for reformed politics.

Perestroika is an urgent necessity arising from the profound processes of development in Soviet socialist society. This society is ripe for change. It has long been yearning for it. Any delay in beginning perestroika could have led to an exacerbated internal situation in the near future, which, to put it bluntly, would have been fraught with serious social, economic and political crises.

In the seventies and also in the early eighties declining rates of growth and economic stagnation seriously affected the Soviet society. Negative trends seriously affected the social sphere. This led to the appearance of the so-called "residual principle" in accordance with which social and cultural programmes received what remained in the budget after allocations to production. A "deaf ear" sometimes seemed to be turned to social problems. The social sphere began to lag behind other spheres in terms of technological development, personnel, know-how and most importantly, quality of work.

There was large scale erosion of the public morality alcoholism, drug addiction and crime and the penetration of the stereotypes of mass culture alien to Soviet society which bred vulgarity and low tastes and brought about ideological barrenness.

At the administrative levels there emerged a disrespect for the law and encouragement of eyewash and bribery, servility and glorification. Working people were justly indignant at the behaviour of people who, enjoying trust and responsibility, abused power, suppressed criticism, made fortunes and, in some cases, even became accomplices in - if not organizers of - criminal acts.

In April 1985 Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee the basic principles of the new strategy of perestroika was formulated. The concept of restructuring with all the problems involved had been evolving gradually. Way back before the April Plenary Meeting a group of Party and state leaders had begun a comprehensive analysis of the state of the economy. Their analysis then became the basis for the documents of perestroika.<sup>12</sup>

The policy of restructuring puts everything in its place. According to Gorbachev, " We are fully restoring the principle of socialism: from each according to his ability, to each according to his work",<sup>13</sup> and we seek to affirm social justice for all, equal rights for all, one law for all, one kind of discipline for all, and high responsibilities for each. Perestroika raises the social responsibility and expectation.

Restructuring calls for full blooded functioning by all public organisations, all production teams and creative unions, new forms of activity by citizens and the revival

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12 M. Gorbachev, Perestroika : New Thinking for Our Country and the World (London: William Collins, 1987), p. 27,

13 Ibid., p. 31.

of those which have been forgotten. In short, it tries to democratize all aspects of Soviet society. The democratization is also the main guarantee that the current process are irreversible.

Perestroika provides that only through the consistent development of the democratic of forms inherent in socialism and through the expansion of self-government can Soviet Union make progress in production, science and technology, culture and art and in all social spheres. This is the only way to ensure conscious discipline. Perestroika itself can only come through democracy.

According to Gorbachev, " we place emphasis on the development of socialist democracy that we pay so much attention to the intellectual sphere, public consciousness and an active social policy. Thereby we want to invigorate the human factor" (14)

In June 1987, Plenary Meeting of CPSU Central Committee adopted "Fundamentals of Radical Restructuring of Economic Management".<sup>15</sup> Perhaps this is the most important and most radical programme for economic reform since Lenin introduced his New Economic Policy in 1921. The present economic reform envisages that the emphasis will be shifted

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14 Ibid., p. 32.

15 Ibid., p. 35.

from primarily administrative to primarily economic management methods at every level, and calls for extensive democratization of management, and the overall activization of the human factor.

The adoption of fundamental principles for a radical change in economic management was a big step forward in the programme of perestroika. Perestroika involves the elimination from society of the distortions of socialist ethics, the consistent implementation of the principles of social justice. It means the unity of words and deeds, rights and duties. It is the elevation of honest highly qualified labour, the overcoming of levelling tendencies in pay and consumerism.

According to Gorbachev, " the end result of perestroika is clear to us. It is a thorough renewal of every aspect of Soviet life; it is giving socialism the most progressive forms of social organisation; it is the fullest exposure of the humanist nature of our social system in its crucial aspects - economic, social, political and moral". (16).

Every part of perestroika and the programme as a whole, is based on the principle of more socialism and more democracy and it revises the Leninist concept of socialist construction both in theory and practice. More

socialism means a more dynamic pace and creative endeavour, more organization, more scientific methods and initiative in economic management, efficiency in administration and a better and materially richer life for the people.

More socialism means more democracy, openness and collectivism in everyday life, more culture and humanism in production, social and personal relations among people, more dignity and self-respect for the individual.

More socialism means more patriotism and aspiration to noble ideals, more active, civic concern about the country's internal affairs and about their positive influence on international affairs.

According to Gorbachev, " We will proceed towards better socialism rather than away from it. We are for socialism and we are not imposing our views on anyone. Let everyone make his own choice; history will put everything in its place". (17)

## II. Need for Change

The Soviet socialist society is characterised by fundamental concepts like, democratic centralism, vanguard

party, state ownership of means of production, central command administrative system, state control of mass-media etc. These concepts in a socialist society like Soviet Union served as weapons to bring about communism at the minimum possible time. These concepts, from the emergence of Soviet society, served as the guiding principle and was solely responsible for its development or decay. Periodic elections to the party governing bodies from top to bottom, periodic accountability of Party bodies to their Party organisations, subordination of the minority to the majority and lastly decisions of higher bodies are binding upon lower ones. These were the four fundamental points of the principle of democratic centralism, propounded by Lenin. This was envisaged to enrich the democratic values inherent in socialism. Secondly, the concept of equality, of rights was manifested in the principle of social ownership of means of production. Collectivisation manifested the revered ideal, each according to one's ability and each according to one's needs. Thirdly, the central administrative structure was represented by persons who were responsible to the people and accountable to them.

But gradually these democratic principles that were there in socialism lost its ground and led to excessive

centralisation or dictatorship, to be more precise. For years there were no elections to the party offices, accountability of the party bodies was zero. So from democratic centralism the democratic content disappeared. So far as state ownership of means of production was concerned, corruption was rampant. Favouritism and partiality took the place of equality of rights. Large scale censorship was introduced and people's right to information was curtailed. This made the state more powerful and the individual was subjugated to this ever-increasing state power.

These inherent contradictions thus accumulated and was the major reason for the popular resentment in East Europe. In all spheres of life socio-political or economic the democratic flavour was missing on the contrary, there was over centralisation. This had inspired the Hungarians to go for a fundamental change within the basic framework of socialism, they were later joined by Czechoslovaks.

Both the countries tried to redefine Marxism and give it a human face. They were convinced that socialism could never become a success without strengthening its democratic character. So a large-scale reform programme



was envisaged in Hungary's Petofi Circle declaration and Czechoslovakia's Action Programme.

Both the blueprints of reform advocated a decentralised and free society with maximum possible dignity of the individual, decentralised party structure, proper accountability of party bureaucrats and freedom of expression. All these septemic change were envisaged within the basic framework of socialism and the supremacy of the Communist Party was kept intact. It was an effort by the socialists to reform themselves as well as to bring forth a better society.

III. Democratisation of Soviet Society and Reform in the Political System

The Soviet state was born as a tool of the dictatorship of the proletariat and, at a later stage of social development, evolved into a state of the whole people. The task now is to bring Soviet state system into full conformity with this concept, with all matters to be decided by the people and their plenipotentiary representatives and to be handled under full and effective popular control.

The 19th All-Union Party Conference extensively discussed and adopted major decisions on promoting perestroika, reforming the political system and further democratizing the

the Party and society.

The Conference held that the forthcoming reform of the political system must tackle the following tasks:

1. To give widest possible scope to the self-governing of Soviet society and create favourable conditions to encourage as much as possible the initiative of individuals, representatives government bodies, party and other public organisations and work collectives;
2. To set a smoothly operating mechanism in motion to democratically identify and shape the interests and the will of all classes and social groups, to bring them into harmony and to realize them within the framework of Soviet domestic and foreign policy ;
3. To radically strengthen socialist legality and law and order so as to rule out usurpation or abuses of power, effectively combat bureaucratic and formalistic attitudes, and ensure reliable guarantees for the protection of the people's constitutional rights and freedoms and for the performance by citizens of their obligations before society and the state;
4. To clearly delineate the functions of Party and government bodies in line with the Leninist concept

of the Communist Party's role as the political vanguard of society and the role of the Soviet state as the entity organizing and administering the people's power;

5. To establish an effective mechanism to ensure timely self-renewal of political system with due regard for changes in domestic and international conditions, as well as the development and promotion of the principles of socialist democracy and self-government in all social spheres.

The reform of the political system must be integral, comprehensive, coordinated with the country's economic and social restructuring and implemented as quickly as possible.

- i) The reform of the political system is primarily aimed at ensuring the full authority of the Soviet of People's Deputies as the basis of socialist state system and self-governing in our country.
- ii) The Conference deemed it necessary to enhance the legislative, managerial and supervisory functions of the Soviets, to transfer decision-making powers to them on all important questions relating to government and the economic and socio-cultural spheres, and to

restore the prerogative of elective bodies over the executive and its apparatus. Party policy - economic, social and ethnic - should be conducted primarily via the bodies of people's representatives.

The Conference advocated the decentralisation and a redistribution of functions and powers to ensure the highest possible level of initiative and independence at the local level as a major aspect of the reform of the political system.

The Conference regarded the establishment of a socialist state committed to the rule of law - a fully socialist form of organizing political power - as a matter of fundamental importance. The solving of this task is inseparably linked with the ensurance of the fullest possible rights and freedoms of citizens with the responsibility of the state to the citizen; with the raising of the prestige of Soviet laws and their strict observance by all Party and government bodies, public organizations, collectives and citizens; and with effective work of law enforcement agencies.

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important component of this system. The trade unions, the Young Communist League, Cooperatives, Womens', Veterans' and other organisations, express the interests and aspirations of various sections of Soviet society and help the Party and the state to shape domestic and foreign policies in a way that originally combines the interests of all the people. The Conference noted the need to democratize their affairs, grant more independence and responsibility to their work.

In this context the Conference advocated the necessity of the existence of a permanent system ensuring free dialogue criticism, self-criticism, self-control and self-assessment within the Party and within society.

The Conference believed that the success of the reform of the political system decisively depended on the work of the Party and made it binding on all Party organisations and all Communists to act vigorously and creatively in the tackling of the issues at hand. As the initiator and vigorous champion of the reform, the Party would effectively discharge its mission as the political vanguard of the working class and all working people.

It was impossible for the CPSU to play the vanguard role in perestroika and in the renewal of the Soviet Society

without a profound democratization of the Party's activities. The prime task was to fully restore the Leninist vision of democratic centralism, which implied free discussion at the stage when a particular question was being considered and united action when the majority had adopted the decision. Steps to expand democracy within the Party should be charted and taken so that all the elements of the CPSU can act in a spirit of Party comradeship, with free discussion of all topical questions of policy and practice, criticism, self-criticism, collectivism, conscious discipline and personal responsibility.

The Conference regarded the full restoration of the Leninist principle of collective discussion and decision-making as a key factor in democratizing the Party. The Conference views democratization of the electoral process within the Party as a matter of prime importance. The election of members and Secretaries of all Party Committees - up to and including the CPSU Central Committee - should feature free discussion by the candidates, voting by secret ballot and an opportunity to nominate more candidates than there were seats to be filled.<sup>18</sup>

So far as theoretical background is concerned perestroika has nothing new to offer. It owes tremendously

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18 Ibid., p. 289.

to the Marxist-Leninist concept of socialist democracy and the experiments of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Due to various socio-economic problems restructuring of the Soviet society became inevitable. The main reason for such a jaundiced society can be attributed to the gradual departure from the socialist legality as enumerated, by Lenin. The socialist pluralism lost its shape, rather disappeared, during the time of Stalin with his 'cult of personality! Equality of rights, dignity of humanbeings and democracy all these concepts, which were the principal ideals of Lenin's socialist democracy remained only in books and hardly had anything to do with practice.

Gorbachev took this opportunity to advocate his reform programme. Perestroika takes us back to the days of Lenin, who visioned a decentralised and free society for Soviet Union, where there would not be exploitation of man by man, where there would not be alienation of man from the society, where there would not be concentration of power and where there would be proper dignity of individual.

So at such a juncture, when Soviet society is almost on the verge of a collapse, perestroika advocates the revered ideals of Lenin. It talks of large-scale democratization of Soviet society, it talks of a fundamental restructuring of the base in order to shape the superstructure.

CHAPTER -II



## REFORM MOVEMENT OF HUNGARY

Hungary has had three major revolutions in her modern history - in 1848, 1918, and 1956. The Revolution of 1848 was a rising of the nation against foreign rule, in a pre-industrial age: it was a movement of landed gentry, intellectuals and peasants. The Revolution of 1918 was a rising of the industrial working class against the old social order; but armed conflict with neighbouring nations turned into a national movement. In the 1956 revolution the social and national factors were fused: it was a rising of the workers against exploitation, of the intellectuals against thought control, and of the whole nation against the Soviet imperialists.<sup>1</sup>

It all started with Khrushchev the new leader of the Soviet Union, who had not only permitted, but led, the destruction of the Stalin cult; it was Communist youths who organised the debates in the Petofi Circle, and it was the leading Communist writers, old and

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1 Melvin, J. Lasky, "The Hungarian Revolution", (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd., 1957), p. 13.

trustworthy servants of the Party, who clamoured for a new and no doubt, Communist-freedom. People in Hungary had a feeling that this new freedom, while it might lead at least temporarily to some improvement, was a sham.<sup>2</sup> It was organised by Communists and was likely to go only as far as the Communists would permit. However, the hopes for freedom in a Communist society was shattered when in 1955 popular leader Imre Nagy was replaced by Rakosi, the most hated and despised Stalinist dictator. In spite of all the talk about a new era, fresh air and real freedom, even after the second fall of Rakosi in July 1956, the Stalinist dictator was replaced by another old Stalinist. Erno Gero, who shared personal responsibility with Rakosi for the most outrageous crimes of the regime.

In contrast to the hopeful signs which were interpreted differently by different people - there was the grim reality of everyday life. The economic situation looked almost hopeless; people were shabby, poor, ill-clad and ill-shod, they knew perfectly well that the Russians were bleeding Hungarians white and there was no chance of serious

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2 George Mikes, "The Hungarian Revolution", (London: Andre Deulush Ltd., 1957), p. 9.

economic improvement.

This, then, was the position on 21st October. Ten days later Hungary was a free country and something like a western democracy. Erno Gero had been replaced by Imre Nagy, the only popular communist in the country. New political parties were being formed - or rather the old ones were re-formed - and their representatives had already become members of the government.<sup>3</sup> The freedom of the press had been re-established and new papers flooded the capital and the provinces. The Russians had withdrawn, if not from the country, atleast from Budapest, statues of Stalin and Soviet war memorials were ruined, Soviet star had been torn from the caps of officers and soldiers and the Soviet emblem cut out of the National flag. An unexpected, unplanned and incredible revolution had been victorious in Hungary.

I. The reformist venture in Hungary, 1953 - 54

A new period began in July 1953. This was the result of the death of Stalin, the riots in Pilsen, the East

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3 Ferenc Feher & Agnes Heller, "Hungary 1956, Revisited". (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1983), p. 100.

German rising and the fall of Beria . Rakosi gave up the Premiership to Imre Nagy, and contented himself with the post of First Secretary of the party, over which he firmly maintained his grip. Nagy announced a new and milder policy. This coincided with the milder regime promised in the Soviet Union by Stalin's successors.<sup>4</sup> In this "New Course" Hungary went further than any other East European country. More attention was paid to the needs of agriculture, and peasants were allowed to leave collective farms. Where a majority of members wished to dissolve a collective farm, they were allowed to do so. In the following months about one-tenth of the farms made use of this right, Nagy also reduced the pace of industrial development and promised to pay more attention to consumer goods.

But in a serious turn of events Imre Nagy was removed from the office on 18th April 1955, from the Central Committee of the party as well as the Premiership. His agricultural policy was stated to have been wrong, and he was also accused of having underrated the importance of heavy industry and of having built up the People's Front (a mass organisation completely controlled by the

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4 Melvin. J. Lasky, n.1, p. 21.

Communist Party) as a rival to the Party itself.

The Hungarian reform movement had been characterised by three distinct phases:

1. Imre Nagy's "New Course" (4th July 1953 to 9th March 1955).
2. The continued ferment under Matyas Rakosi's neo-Stalinism (14th April, 1955 to 18th July 1956).
3. The liberal upsurge under the equally dogmatic ~~Erno~~ Gero, culminating in Nagy's return to the premiership (18th July to 24th October 1956).

## II. The New Course

The Hungarians did not have a single document like the Action Programme of the Czechoslovakia. But the elements of the future Czechoslovak programme were more or less incorporated in Nagy's 'New Course' and in a whole series of plans and programmes that were adopted by a variety of social and professional organisations over a period of three-and-a-half years. It was outlined in the "Dissertations" that Nagy first presented to the Central Committee of the Hungarian Workers (Communist) Party in 1955 and again when he was suspended from the Party in 1956. The reformers position was finally

synthesized in the sixteen point programme proclaimed by the university students on 22nd October 1956.

Nagy vehemently opposed Rakosi's governmental policies. He advocated fundamental changes in every field and started with the abandonment of forced industrialisation.

Nagy denounced Rakosi's collectivization programme, for which "both economic and political foundations were lacking". Even though the agricultural production was dependent on individual farming, the government without doing anything, persecuted them. The previous leadership also resorted to violent pressures which "outraged the peasantry's sense of justice." The new government, determined to change this, prohibited the usual "fall reappropriation campaign",<sup>5</sup> and decided to slow down the tempo of collectivization.

Nagy abolished the "Kulak lists". Inclusion in such

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5 Obligatory reappropriation was one of the methods applied by the Rakosi regime in its efforts to uproot the individual peasants. Under this system, the government periodically expropriated parts of peasant holdings and gave their owners distant and inferior tracts of land in return, the best land being turned over to state farms.

a list was ruinous for the private farmer because it subjected him to crippling disabilities (exclusion from credit, from distribution of fertiliser, and so on) as well as constant harassment.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to this the "New Course" brought some fundamental changes. In order to improve the supply of goods and services in the cities, the government issued licenses for small handicraft and retail establishments. Intellectuals and professional people were to be treated with greater consideration. Above all, Nagy promised to do away with violations of "legality" perpetrated by the police organs of the regime, and with the "excesses, abuses and other acts of harassment that hurt the people's sense of justice and opened up a gap between the toiling people and the state organs and local councils". The new programme contemplated the revision of cases of unjustly imprisoned people, the abolition of internment camps, and the liberation of political prisoners whose offenses were not serious.

One of the most important sections of this dissertation

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6 Paul Kecskemeti, "The Unexpected Revolution", (Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 45.

was the chapter entitled "The Five Basic Principles of International Relations and the Question of Our Foreign Policy". The five principles set forth by Nagy were: national independence, national sovereignty, national equality, territorial inviolability and the precept of non-interference in internal affairs. During this period, these five principles formed the leitmotiv of Soviet and of Chinese Communist policy. They had already been adopted by such active neutralists as Nehru and Tito. The Bandung Conference of Afro-Asian powers also embraced the formula. The conclusions Nagy drew from these principles cannot be limited to the capitalist systems or to the battle between the two systems, but must extend to relations between the countries within the democratic and socialist camps.... National independence, sovereignty and equality, and territorial inviolability and non-interference in internal affairs have the same importance in all countries, whether they are capitalist, socialist, people's democracies or any other type of regime.

The "New Course" was extremely popular, as it promised a thorough-going change in the socio-economic and political sphere. Even peasants in the villages concluded that "Communism was over".<sup>7</sup>

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7 Ibid., p. 45.



### III. The Writers' Revolt

One of the outstanding features of the Hungarian revolution was the involvement of intellectuals, especially a number of Communist writers within the officially sponsored Writers' Association. Writers released from prison during Nagy's Premiership exercised a large influence behind the scene. The Petofi club (named after the revolutionary poet who had played a leading part in 1848) was formed during Nagy's period. It provided a forum for literary discussions which soon took a political character, and which drew in many younger people, including university students. At the Petofi Club the demand for the return of Nagy to power was openly expressed. During the summer political criticism increased in the Hungarian press, especially in the organ of Writers' Association, Irodalmi Ujsag. In September the Writers' Association held its Congress, and elected a new Committee. The exponents of the party line, who had managed the Association in the past, were not reelected, and several persons who had recently emerged from prison became members.

The June 1953 resolution of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Communist Party impressed on the country's Communist writers that contemporary social arrangements,

though they bore the Party's imprint, still called for criticism in the "Progressive" vein; that is, the sort of criticism that, until then, had been applied only to the social iniquities of the past systems. The new watchword was that Hungarian literature had to be revitalized by re-establishing contact with authentic, unembellished reality. The exclusive concern with conforming to the Party's wishes in the presentation had made Hungarian literature dull and indigestible.

The first notable product of the new critical realism was Peter Kuczka's 'Nydr Country Diary'. It criticises the Communist authorities for the misery of the people. The main subject is the peasants' rising against the collective farming system following Nagy's inaugural speech. The poem burst on the literary and political scene like a bombshell. Party bureaucrats condemned it indignantly, but the writers did not care; the leading literacy periodicals began publishing unorthodox critical pieces.

The workers played a very significant role in accelerating the reform movement. On 23rd October they gathered in the Petofi Club and passed the following resolution which was known as the 'Ten demands of Petofi Circle'.

1. The first of the ten demands of the Petofi Circle was that the Central Committee of the Workers (Communist) Party should be convened with the minimum possible delay and that Comrade Imre Nagy should take part in the preparatory work of this session.
2. The workers considered it necessary that the Party and Government should reveal the country's economic situation in all sincerity, revise the Five Year Plan directives, and work out a specific constructive programme in accordance with our special Hungarian conditions.
3. They urged that Central Committee and the Government should adopt every method possible to ensure the development of socialist democracy, by specifying the real functions of the Party, asserting the legitimate aspirations of the working class and by introducing factory self-determination and workers' democracy.
4. To ensure the prestige of the Party and of the state administration they proposed that Comrade Imre Nagy and other Comrades who fought for socialist democracy and Leninist principles should occupy a worthy place in the direction of the Party and the Government.
5. They proposed the expulsion of Matyas Rakosi from the Party Central Committee and his recall from the

National Assembly and the Presidential Council and that the Central Committee, which wished to establish claim in the country, must offset present attempts at a Stalinist and Rakosi-ite restoration.

6. They propose that the case of Mihaly Farkas be tried in public in accordance with socialist legality.
7. The Central Committee should revise resolutions it passed in the period which had just elapsed - resolutions which proved wrong and sectarian - above all the resolutions of March 1955, the December 1955 and the 30th June, 1955 resolution on the Petofi Circle. They proposed that the Central Committee should annul these resolutions and draw the proper conclusions as to the persons concerned.
8. Even the most delicate questions must be made public, including the balance sheets of foreign trade agreements and the plans for Hungarian uranium. the workers demanded
9. To consolidate Hungarian Soviet friendship, they urged even closer relations with the Soviet Party, state and people, on the basis of Leninist principle of complete equality.
10. They demanded that at its meeting on 23rd October the DISZ Central Committee should declare its stand on the

points of this resolution and adopt a resolution for the democratisation of the Hungarian Youth Movement.<sup>8</sup>

A special feature of the 1956 revolution was the part played by the working class. The workers were slower to more than the intellectuals, but once they were fully engaged they showed themselves very stubborn. It was the workers who provided the main fighting forces in Budapest stiffened offcourse by army units. The last centres of organised fighting were the great industrial centres - Csepel island and Dunapentele. It is ironical that the latter, a new steel plant founded with Soviet equipment, had been named Sztalinvaros as a symbol of Hungary's enslavement to Soviet Russia. After military resistance had ended, the workers in factories and mines continued strikes and passive resistance. Throughout the winter 1956-57 resistance still continued.

If the disparity between the strength of the combatants is taken into account, one may say that the effort of the Hungarian workers is the greatest single

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8 Melvin, J. Lasky, n.1, p. 47.

effort of resistance ever made by an industrial working class against an oppressor.

The revolution of 1956 had the same fate as that of 1848-49, i.e., the re-establishment of a hated regime by Russian military force. A hundred years ago this took a longer time, the Austro-Hungarian war lasted for ten months, the Russian intervention three, while the whole revolution and war of 1956 was over in less than one month.<sup>9</sup>

Hungary's was the first bold attempt towards democracy and a humane socialism. It was one of the first countries to raise her voice against totalitarianism and undoubtedly one of the first countries in the quest of her own individual identity rather than a mere satellite of the Soviet Union. It initiated an experiment which was after 12 years concretized by Czechoslovakia.

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9 Ibid., p. 22.

CHAPTER - III

## REFORM MOVEMENT IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA -

The social democratic forces and the quest for a systemic change in Czechoslovakia was not the result of a single incident rather it was the culmination of years of struggle, disappointments, setbacks and half-fulfilled hopes. The genesis of such a quest for reform can be traced back to a movement which began in fact, in the mid fifties with the death of Stalin and Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956. Gradually, like many other Communist colleagues of the world, the Czech and Slovak Communists started questioning some of the methods if not the dubious achievements of their years in power. While some examined the idea of reform; the students and intellectuals went one step ahead in demanding the same.

It was perhaps astonishing to note that a country with a democratic humanitarian tradition of several hundred years, the one society which had known a genuine western-style democracy in this century and a pre-war legal Communist Party which itself was notorious in Communist circles for its evolutionary-parliamentary bias, should be one of the most stubborn in throwing off the Stalinist practices condemned even in Russia



by 1956. Yet there were a number of circumstances which combined to militate against de-Stalinisation in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s. Among these was the rule of the apparatchiks, that is, of those people such as Party first secretary Antonin Novotny, who had risen to power during the massive purges in the 1949-54 period. It was through loyal and unquestioning obedience to the old methods that these people had survived and risen; they then continued to use these methods once in power. The leadership had been so involved in the past excesses of the Party that it probably could not survive genuine liberalization. Novotny himself, as well as most of the others in his regime, had been too directly involved in the preparation and perpetration of the purge trials - including the trials of the Slovak 'nationalist' which took place after the deaths of Stalin, Gottwald, and Beria - to risk a genuine review and rehabilitation, which were part of 'de-Stalinisation'.

There were four other factors which in the 50's avoided any kind of a reform. One of the potent factors was the relative economic stability in Czechoslovakia. After the economic problems of 1953 and certain concessions, the standard of living in Czechoslovakia had risen at a relatively satisfactory rate. However, the economic

successes of these years were later proven to be only partial and deceptive in so far as genuine progress within the framework of a viable economy was concerned, but at the time the regime could point to certain successes. They, in fact, led it triumphantly to declare the ascension to socialism in 1960 and the adoption of a socialist constitutions. The other factors being the feeling of friendship or atleast good natured tolerance for the Russians and the absence of a strong anti-Russian tradition which might have acted as a strong stimulant for liberalisation, as in the case of Poland and Hungary in 1956.

But by 1962 the situation was quite different and the factors militating for liberalization were much stronger or had replaced those which earlier constituted obstacles. For example, the economy was in a nearly critical situation by 1962 and in August of that year the Third Five Year Plan had to be scrapped half way through. The failure of the plan, the continued deterioration of the economy, and the inability for these reasons to promulgate more than adhoc one-year plans-all pointed to the need for reform

It was added by the chronic weakness of the regime and was aggravated by a power struggle -albeit between two conservatives - which impaired the unity of the apparnt.

This struggle between Novotny and his Interior Minister Barak did not render the alternative of de-Stalinisation any more attractive and safe in the eyes of Novotny, but it did weaken his ability to withstand the pressures for change.<sup>1</sup> Again the Party was divided over the action against the slightly more popular, yet conservative, competitor for power. At the same time, more progressive Party people were agitated by Novotny's efforts to stage a show-trial, not only of Barak, but also of several liberals accused of creating a 'pro-Titoist group', and this at a time when many countries of Eastern Europe had renounced such methods and permitted rehabilitations.

A third factor operating in the direction of de-Stalinization came from Moscow. The 22nd Congress of the CPSU, with its opening of the second wave of de-Stalinization, led to pressures on various parties in Eastern Europe, including the Czechoslovak Party, finally to begin to take step towards de-Stalinization. These pressures were also connected with Soviet concern over

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1 G. Golan, Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p.3.

the Czechoslovak economic situation and the possible failure of the latter to fulfill its obligations to the bloc. Moscow's past willingness to tolerate continued Stalinism in Prague may have been tempered by the increasing awareness that Czechoslovakia might no longer be able to return the favour through its usual economic performance. Moscow may well have argued that the de-Stalinization demanded by the Twenty-Second CPSU Congress could provide the tools necessary to restore the Czechoslovak economy to good working order.

With the accumulation of pressures and objective factors, in 1962, many Slovaks saw that their specifically Slovak interest might be served by de-Stalinization or even by liberalization - and the circumstances now fortuitous for pressures in this direction together with like minded Czechs. For Slovaks the most immediate demand was the revision of the past verdicts against Slovak Communist Party leadership; thus the Slovaks' greatest interest in de-Stalinization may in a review of the past trials and rehabilitation of the former Slovak leaders, including Gustav Ausak and Laco Novomesky, as well as Vladimir Clementis (posthumously).

It was the confluence of factors: economic crisis,

political instability, pressure from Moscow, and Slovak exploitation of the situation, which brought Novotny, reluctantly, to abandon some of his habitual caution and agree to a very limited de-Stalinization. Thus in August of 1962 he appointed a committee to review the trials, and at the December 1962 twelfth Party Congress he announced both his decision and that of the Party to explore economic reforms. The overall conservative tone of the congress, however, was probably the result of efforts by Novotny to minimize the significance of these decisions and, perhaps, an indication that he was still thinking in terms of merely symbolic de-Stalinization.

The Czech and Slovaks perceived de-Stalinization as a Party affair, a movement for reform from within, spearheaded by Party intellectuals: and this drive gained momentum, one change led to another. For example, in response to pressures from the liberals, Novotny agreed to certain personnel changes: the old Stalinist, Karol Bacilek, who had played an active role in the purges of Slovaks, was replaced as Slovak Party first secretary in April 1963 by the moderati-liberal Alexander Dubcek. Dubcek in turn accorded the Slovak press and Party press a large degree of freedom, evoking public censure

from Novotny in June 1963.<sup>2</sup>

The Stalinist type command economy faced scathing criticisms in the hands of liberal economists and needed change. According to the liberal critics, this system which followed an extensive path of economic development was no longer effective rather counter productive in a socialist economy with a broad industrial base.<sup>3</sup> They further argued that the Czechoslovak socialist economy had entered a second stage of economic development in which concentration should be shifted from an 'extensive' to an intensive system i.e. to improved productivity, efficiency and quality. It was also brought to notice that the highly centralised, administratively determined, quantitative system had stifled initiative, led to a decline in both productivity and standards, produced unfulfilled demand ('suppressed inflation' as some called it), created foreign trade imbalances, waste, and a lack of progress. The 'cult of the plan', with its concern for gross output instead of economic values, reliance upon directives rather than economic instruments,

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2 Rude Pravo (Prague), 13th June, 1963.

3 G. Golan, n. 1, p. 7.

politicization of the economy (e.g. the cadre system), Party interference in and control over all aspects of the economy, and political rather than economic criteria in foreign trade and investment, had together sapped the strength of the Czechoslovak economy.<sup>4</sup>

It was found, in the context of Czechoslovak society, that the whole concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat and its counterpart, the Leninist concept of Party, might also be unsuitable bases.

Czechoslovak theoreticians argued that socialist society, too, was composed of various 'strata' of groups, although not classes in the Marxist sense of the term since all had the same relation to the means of production in a socialist society. These groups not only existed but often brought with them conflicting interests. It was even suggested that these conflicting interests might be the very motor of progress in this type of society. The dictatorship of the proletariat was not, therefore, the responsible form of government for such a society, for there was hardly the need for a dictatorship of one class over the others when in fact classes had been eliminated.

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4 Ibid., p. 7.

Practical needs and ideological considerations, however, accelerated the pace of the need for a thorough systemic change. The tradition of the Czech nation at the same time, played a vital role so far as the reforms were concerned. Unlike the Polish, the Czechoslovaks were interested in a slow and gradual change. They preferred a slow, meticulous formulation of legal revision with the idea of institutionalizing the changes and altering the very structure and fiber of society. This plodding undramatic, but thorough undertaking promised to make of the Czechoslovak reforms a more lasting and potentially significant endeavour than their predecessors elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

#### I. Economic Reforms

The major part of the economic reforms had been worked out prior to 1968, discussions during the revival period sought mainly to ensure implementation of the reforms, to improve them or undo the restrictions placed upon them earlier, and to bring about the political reforms necessary for the introduction of market socialism. The two major innovations of the revival period in this area were, therefore, the establishment of enterprise councils to provide workers with a share in enterprise direction and a restructuring of the enterprise system to provide



the till then thwarted enterprise with the independence necessary for the functioning of the new system.<sup>5</sup> The Party's new programme known as the Action Programme and accepted by the Central Committee at its early April meeting, sought to ensure enterprise independence by changing the nature of the branch-enterprise relationship. In response to the arguments of liberal economists, enterprise subordination to branch directorates was to be mitigated by the right of enterprises to associate, reassociate, and leave the branches or trusts to which they belonged. In this way the branch directorates would not have total power over the member enterprises. This might of an enterprise to choose its own 'organisational allegiance' was not, however, unlimited. To prevent chaos or to prevent successful enterprises from regrouping at the expense of weaker enterprises, for example, it was decided that organisational changes would be permitted only when economically desirable; the Premier Cernik explained that this would be determined by the branch and central organs.

The goal of such an economic reform was to place the economy on a market - determined, profit basis as distinct from the former plan-directed, volume-oriented system. Enterprises were to be independent (as stated

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

earlier), not only from directives and quotas but also from state support. They were to be dependent upon their gross income to cover their expenses, including wages. In this way the enterprise would be forced to gear production, in structure, costs and assortment, to the demands of the market, for only from its profits would it cover its costs. Unsuccessful enterprises were to close. This dependence of an enterprise of its own means was intended to provide an incentive for workers, as well as for increased productivity and technological advance, since wages were to be paid out of the gross income. A bogus system would also be introduced for special contributions to the increased income of the enterprise. Investments were to be financed partially by the plant's own resources and partially with the help of credits from the state bank. These credits were to be awarded on the basis of the economic effectiveness of the project and the ability of the enterprise to repay, with more or less fixed interest rates.

So far wages are concerned, it were to be differentiated according to the workers' tasks and merit, instead of the former system of wage-equalization. While the level of wages was to depend on the success or failure of the plant, prices were to be flexible, depending upon the market. The market must be competitive, with foreign as well as domestic goods vying for the consumer's attention.

Although the goal was free prices, a transitional three category system would be used in which prices would be either, fixed, flexible within limits, or entirely free.<sup>6</sup>

The roles of the state, the central authorities, and the plan were to be clearly delineated and limited to guidance. Neither the government nor the Party was to interfere in plant operations or in the basic planning of the enterprise. The enterprise would have complete freedom in choosing its own suppliers and to determine its own yearly operational plan. The state was to limit itself to longterm plans designed principally to predict trends in supply, demand, cost and resources, so as to provide overall long-range coordination for the economy as a whole.

The Action Programme called for an end to administrative measures and the measures restricting the implementation of the economic reform. It condemned the practice of

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6 G. Golan, "The Czechoslovak Reform Movement", (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 63.

7 The Action Programme was published in Rude Pravo 10th April 1968.

perpetuating economic backwardness, together with pricing policies, subsidies, grants, and most important of all, the system of surcharges in foreign trade' and 'immense network of protectionism' calling it senseless to paralyse an economic policy forever by taking things away from those who work efficiently and giving them to those who manage poorly'. The Action Programme further asserted that enterprises confronted with a demanding market must be granted the freedom to decide on all problems concerning the immediate management of the enterprise and its operation, and they must be enabled to react in creative manner to the demands of the market'.

The Action Programme strongly urged 'submitting our economy to the pressure of the world market', for the reasons expressed by the reform economists and even the regime so many times before, i.e. to raise the technological level of domestic products, to improve the balance of trade, to bring domestic prices in line with world prices and achieve a convertible currency. The original reforms had proclaimed just this aim of improving domestic production by the introduction of an element of pressure for meeting world standards; it remained, however, to overcome the obstacles which stood in the way of implementation of this goal.

Reforms in the sphere of foreign trade concerned three issues : organisation of foreign trade; prices and the achievement of convertible currency; the orientation of trade. The Action Programme accepted the reformers' demand for an end to the foreign trade monopolies, first by permitting the enterprises to choose to export-import firm they wished to uses and, secondly, by permitting the enterprises to 'act independently on foreign markets.<sup>8</sup> As it had been agreed that all bureaucratic obstacles standing between the producer and the consumer, whether domestic or foreign, must be eliminated if the market were to operate positively, this organisational change was in keeping with the principle of enterprise independence. Thus the draft enterprise bill provided that the enterprise council and director, i.e. the autonomous management of the enterprise, would be exclusively responsible for the commercial obligations of the enterprise abroad as well as at home. The first applications for such direct contacts were taken under consideration in October 1968, according to the Czechoslovak news agency, CTK.

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8 G.Golan, n. 1, p. 35.

The Action Programme asserted that in addition to continued CMEA cooperation, Prague would also actively encourage the development of economic relations with any other country in the world that is interested, on the basis of equality of rights and mutual benefits without discrimination. The Programme further advocated the development of progressive forms of international collaboration, particularly in production and pre-production operations, exchange of scientific technical knowledge, exchange of licenses, and suitable collaboration with interested countries, on loans and other financial matters.

In the spirit of the new policy, Prague opened talks with Austria. In what were the first direct contacts between the foreign ministers of the two countries in over thirty years, negotiations were begun for a settlement of outstanding Austrian claims regarding Czechoslovak nationalisation after 1948. However, Prague's quest for a hard currency loan was controversially attributed to its renewed interest in International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

In the sphere of agriculture the reformers advocated a very few changes. The principal aim of the reformers

in the field of agriculture was to achieve enterprise independence to permit farmers to determine their own affairs, from management and day to day operations to competing on the market. The Action Programme wanted to make individual cooperatives independent, self-contained, and fully authorized economic and social organisations, to abolish the ineffective administrative centralisation of cooperatives, and to super-impose on the cooperative enterprises only those organs which carry out activities that are economically useful to them<sup>9</sup>. The Action Programme envisaged few concrete steps, these were as follows; permission for cooperative farms to engage in business activity in other sectors and, perhaps most important, 'the right and possibility of direct sales of part of the farm production to the people and to the retail trade system! It was done to eliminate partially the monopolistic central purchasing agencies. The Programme also advocated the decentralisation of monopolistic supply organisations. The Party, in this regard, called for a way to establish a direct link between the farmer, the supplier, and the market, i.e., that the farmer might be able to play a more direct role in the marketing of his products and be in a better

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9 G.Golan, n.6, p. 89.

position with regard to those providing supplies and services to agriculture. In this respect farmers also wanted direct purchasing and marketing rights in foreign markets, which would further free them from the monopolistic position particularly of domestic suppliers.

The Programme advocated for a new form of contact between the producers and the market similar to the former agricultural cooperatives.

The District Agricultural Association (DAA), which was a territorial or vertical organisation in practice exercising centralised administrative controls similar to those of association or trust in industry. This form of organisation was vertical rather than functional, and therefore, not likely to be the type of organisation the Action Programme envisaged.<sup>10</sup>

The Action Programme also called for greater cooperation with and help for the private farmers. In keeping with this an Agriculture and Food Ministry official announced that farmers interested in private farming might apply for return of their property confiscated on the basis of an incorrect interpretation of the 1955

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10. G. Golan, n.1, p. 47.



government. The purpose was to remove the stigma attached to private farmers, in an attempt to perpetuate the beneficial role they played in developing certain areas, e.g. land that would otherwise remain fallow.

In keeping with view the proposals of the Action Programme the government prepared a set of guidelines concerning private farms and their relationship with other agricultural units. These proposals according to the Agricultural Ministry daily, Zemedelske novony of 8th August 1968, provided private farmers the right to sell their produce, independently of central direction under substantially the same conditions as the collective and state farms.

## II. Political Reforms

The central attention in the 1968 reform movement was upon the political sphere, specifically on the questions of the concentration of power in the hands of the Party and the right to opposition, for freedom of association and freedom of expression would only be valid - and of interest - if there were freedom to oppose, i.e. an end to the monopolistic power of the Party. There came numerous suggestions as how this power might be curbed and best used, some centering on the element of popular

control, others on a separation of Party and government functions, others on the right to opposition by forces outside the Party, still others on the right to opposition within the Party. Implicit in all of these suggestions was revision of the concept of the leading role of the Party with the establishment of democracy.

i) Role of Party

The Party's task was to provide coordination for society's activities, concerning itself only with the general aims of society, leaving the concrete decisions for daily activities to the various groups in society. The Party should provide no more than a programmatic statement and create conditions for the settlement of conflicts which might arise as a result of leaving matters to the various groups in society. Thus the possibility of conflicting interests was recognised, with the Party to serve as an arbitrator of sorts.<sup>11</sup>

Both the programmatic role and that of arbitrator were inconsistent with the accepted theoretical basis for the role of the Party. It was pointed out by Zdenek Mlynar, Chairman of the Party Committee for political

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11 Rude Pravo, (Prague), 12th January, 1968.

reforms, that the role of the Party had originally been worked out to suit the stage of the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e. to fit the struggle of the working class against all other classes and, in keeping with this, to consolidate the 'centralist command system of economic management' which replaced private ownership.<sup>12</sup>

Party's leading role was strengthened by its role as mediator rather than dictator, as co-participant and independent component rather than controller of political scene. It was advised instead of dogmatism, a living suitable (to the conditions and demands of society) programme would ensure the Party's leading role. In effect the Party's authority would be constantly re-earned rather than being formal.

Dubcek advocated for an end to direct management by the Party and 'administrative and commanding methods! He called for a broad programmatic role of the Party, providing room for the institutions of society to decide on their own plans and activities and for 'the confrontation and exchange of opinions.'<sup>13</sup> Dubcek also advocated the

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12 Rude Pravo, (Prague), 13th January, 1968.

13 Rude Pravo, (Prague), 23rd February, 1968.

idea that the Party must constantly renew its mandate from the people.

The new interpretation of the Party's role was that the Party would no longer maintain a monopoly of power over decision-making; it would, rather, pursue its goals through equal competition in offices, factories, and institutions through people of all interests and backgrounds.

The Action Programme fully endorsed the idea of the leading role of the Party, though it redefined this role in keeping with the theory that a distortion had set in. This distortion, the programme explained, was the result of the 'false thesis that the Party is the instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat'.<sup>14</sup> Presumably this was a rejection of Stalin's institutionalisation of the leading role of the Party based on Lenin's original concept that the Party was not only the vanguard of the working class but also the very embodiment of the proletariat. It was the Leninist concept of the Party which had led to the assumption that Party should rule in the name of the proletariat in

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14 The term 'instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat' is from Stalin's Problems of Leninism.

the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, however long, or short, Lenin anticipated that period to be. According to the Action Programme, the state, plus the economic and social institutions, were the instruments of the proletariat. The Party's leading role consisted of other functions, primarily to 'encourage initiative', to point out the paths and realistic possibilities of Communist prospects and by systematic persuasion and the personal example of Communists, to win over the working people to these prospect, as determined by the programmatic nature of Party activity.

The Programme declared that Party should not 'rule over society', but 'continuously earn (its leading role) by deeds; 'the aim of the Party is not to become a universal administration, it should provide only guidelines rather than concrete decisions. The Party should not replace or dominate the social and political institutions of the society for they, not the Party, represented the varied interests and groups in society. The Party, nonetheless, should play the role of arbitrator for the varying interests, seeking a method of satisfying various interests that will not threaten the long-term interests of society as a whole.

After the January plenum, the Party members began to present proposals for democracy within the Party through adjustment of the concept of democratic centralism. Publication of Party proceedings and the lower Party organisations be provided greater information were amongst the earliest demands. The Action Programme endorsed almost all of the demands connected with democratisation of Party life. It called for democratic discussion and secret voting for all important questions and appointments and stronger working contacts between the Party and the scientific world, with the latter providing alternative proposals. The rights and responsibilities of each of the Party's organs were to be clearly defined, particularly to clarify relations between the elected organs and the apparatus, and measures were to be worked out to provide regular rotation of leading functionaries. Members were to have easier access to information so that participation in decision-making might be broader, and the role of the elected organs was to be strengthened. The Programme further stipulated that 'the clash of opinions is a necessary manifestation of responsible efforts to seek the best solution and to enforce the new against the outdated.' Supporting the idea of internal criticism in an atmosphere free of distrust, the Programme nonetheless retained the principle of Party discipline: once a

decision was made, it was incumbent upon all, including the dissenters, to implement it.

ii) Political reform and the Government

Popular participation has always remained as a key factor in the liquification of the concentration of power. Dubcek often emphasised that democratization could only be accomplished and maintained with 'a high degree of public involvement' and participation of people.<sup>15</sup> The only effective safeguard is the organised public', and that through their deputies.....the representative bodies, 'the elected organs, specifically the parliament, should control how the government and its organs fulfill their tasks'.<sup>16</sup>

Basic to any reform of the elected organs was the resolution of a fundamental contradiction. According to the constitution, and reiterated by a Party resolution in May 1964, the National Assembly was the supreme organ of a state power in the country. Yet the Assembly was subordinate to the Party not only in practice but even by explicit order of the 1966 Party statutes. Reformers such as Lolotka and Stefan Sadovsky pointed out that the

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15 Rude Pravo (Prague) 21 April 1968.

16 Mlada fronta (Prague) 2 April 1968.

National Assembly thus became no more than a rubber stamp for the wishes of the Party, as dictated through the intermediary of the government.

Dubcek advocated restoration of the 'traditional position and authority' of the Presidency, but reformers such as Smrkovsky wanted its leading role in the elected organs in a new way: through the influence of Communist members elected to these organs. It was suggested that the government be elected by the National Assembly rather than appointed by the President, and that it be subject to recall by Assembly. This return to the practice of no-confidence votes was urged by future Assembly Chairman Smrkovsky on Prague radio, 2nd February 1968, even if it required a change in the Constitution. Some other specific proposals such as, demands for qualified persons both as deputies and consultants to the National Assembly, and greater authority for Assembly Committees along the lines of the un-implemented pre-1968 reforms.<sup>17</sup>

The Action Programme endorsed most of these suggestions, calling for a National Assembly 'which will truly make laws

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17 G.Golan, n.1, p. 149



and decide important political questions, and not just approve drafts submitted to it. The programme advocated the strengthening of the control function of the Assembly vis-a-vis the government (and 'all areas of public life'), including the subordinization of the control apparatus, presumably the control commissions, to the Assembly. The Programme restored the Assembly with its Constitutional position as the supreme organ of state power and must establish closer ties with the public opinion of the citizenry.

iii) The National Front and the possibility of opposition -

The National Front consisted of the various mass organisations and the remodelled remnants of certain political parties from the 1945-48 period. If the mass organisations were nothing but transmission belts for the Party, the political parties had even less of a role to play. Their role was only to receive orders from the Central Committee.

The idea of a plurality of political parties within the framework of the National Front found a number of supporters, such as veteran Communist Zora Jesenska, who argued, that there was 'nothing incompatible with socialism'

about the existence of 'real political parties' in the National Front.

It was agreed that the determination of state policy should be gradually shifted from the Communist Party to the National Front, the latter being the organisation of the different interest groups, in which varying view points could be aired and conflicting ideas welded into compromises. In order to safeguard this function new statutes were being worked out for the National Front. It was further decided to limit the freedom of operation of the National Front by demanding that members 'respect of the principles of which the National Front is based', i.e. anti-fascism, anti-racism, communism, alliance with Soviet Union and the other socialist countries.

### III. Cultural Reform

The cultural sphere was one of the main areas where democratization was a necessity. It was during 1963-67 period when the intellectuals first expressed the pressures for change, retreat, or step forward in the process, for freedom of expression stood at the crux of democratization. The intellectuals experienced and demanded modifications

in the regime's cultural policies, as organised interest groups and individuals and the central demand was concentrated on the issue of freedom of expression.<sup>18</sup>

i) The Unions

Two areas where the Writers Union wanted an immediate change were: the Czechoslovak Writers Union demanded Prochazka as the Chairman of the Union and demand to publish their Weekly Journal, banned by the government.

Consequently the reformers succeeded in bringing novelist Josef Sroecky as Chairman of the editorial board. Of greater moment was the announcement that the Union would once again be able to publish a weekly.

Among other concrete issues pursued by the Writers was the release of the young writer Jon Benes; imprisoned in 1967. They secured his pardon after petitioning the President of the Republic, who granted it on 21st March 1968 in what was one of Novotny's last act as President.<sup>19</sup> The Union also secured Party rehabilitation of the writers purged or disciplined as a result of the June 1967

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18 G. Golan, n.1, p. 103.

19 Prague Radio, (Prague), 22nd March 1968.

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Congress (Ivan Klima, A.J. Liehm, Pavel Kohout, Jan Prohazka). Another demand was for the revival of the young writer's literary journal Tvar, suppressed in 1966, Tvar did reappear in November 1968.

ii) Censorship

The issue of censorship concerned on the one hand the flow of information, or the right of the citizen to be fully informed and on the other hand the freedom of the individual to express oneself as one pleased. Censorship acts as an obstacle in the democratic process by avoiding free and fair information.

The campaign against censorship, began immediately after the historic Party plena. It was pointed out that information and publicity were more important than the act of voting in a system of democrated decision-making. This view earlier raised its head in a number of quarters, such as the Bratislava trade union paper Praca which argued on 9th February 1968 that the unity so often sought by the Party could be achieved, among other ways, by informing the public fully and speedily in Party proposals and decisions, in order to make possible 'the confrontation

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20 Czechoslovak Television, 4 February 1968  
(Gold Stucker interview).

of opinions and the assessment of various proposals'.<sup>21</sup>

Control from above of information clearly limited the possibilities for discussion, for it created restrictions on what could and what could not be said or published. Intellectual after intellectual citizen after citizen, expressed the need to shake loose all the limitations on expression.

The call for free exchange of ideas was made in radio and television discussions too, and even in such 'non-cultural' organs as the agricultural weekly, demonstrating that this was not an issue that interested only the intellectuals. Fear had caused people to become silent and continued fear led to continued silence.

The demand for total abolition of censorship began to gain publicity in radio and television discussions in February 1968. In one of these programmes Zdenek Mlynar advocated that Czechoslovak socialist society needs no preliminary censorship since violations of state secrets were already provided for by the penal code and interference in the expression of different views was not justifiable.

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21 G. Golan, n.1, p. III.

So at the end of the analysis of the reform experiments initiated by Czechoslovakia in 1968, one point which immediately comes into perspective is that Stalinism has done more harm to the Czechoslovak society than providing a better socio-political alternative. It was responsible for the excessive centralisation of the Party structure and denied the people the right to information. Furthermore, a large-scale economic stagnation was the result of its bias towards basic and heavy industries at the cost of consumer goods. So a popular resentment against such a model of socialism became inevitable in order to restore its democratic character. Humane socialism, which Gorbachev is talking now had its roots in the 1968 Czechoslovakian reform movement. It was nearly twenty years ago people in the Czechoslovakia ventured to bring out the democratic content inherent in socialism, what Gorbachev intends to do now.

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CHAPTER - IV

REFORM MOVEMENT IN HUNGARY AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA -  
A HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE OUTLINE

Hungary in 1956, presented the Soviet rulers with the first serious challenge to their hegemony in Eastern Europe, twelve years later, a similar crisis was precipitated by Czechoslovakia. In both the cases the results were similar, although the actual course of events differed in several essential respects. The Soviet reaction to the Hungarian challenge was to crush it with fire and sword. In Czechoslovakia, bloodshed was averted by means of a massive army action executed by the troops of the Warsaw Treaty powers, but initiated, led and orchestrated by Moscow.

If the outcome of both crises was basically the same - that is, the reestablishment and reaffirmation of Moscow's control over Eastern Europe - so were their causes. In both Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the reform movements tried to "amalgamate socialism with economic, political, social and cultural democracy to reintegrate communism into the civilised community".<sup>1</sup> These were,

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1 Robert Conquest's View, as quoted by Edward Tabor'sky "The New Era in Czechoslovakia" East Europe (New York), Nov. 1968, p. 25.



however, significant differences between them. The Czechoslovak experiment was compressed into a relatively short span of time (3rd January to 20th August 1968) the Hungarian experiment, more than once interrupted by Soviet intervention, was a more protracted process which went through following three distinct phases:

1. Imre Nagy's "New Course" (4th July, 1953 to 9th March, 1955).
2. The continued ferment under Matyas Rakosi's Neo-Stalinism (14th April, 1955 to 18th July, 1956).
3. The liberal upsurge under the equally dogmatic Erno Gáro culminating in Nagy's return to the premiership (18th July to 24th October, 1956).

The revolutionary phase of the Hungarian events, from 23rd to 30th October 1956, has no parallel in the Czechoslovak ferment, but the invasion of Czechoslovakia on the night of 20th/21st August, 1968, had much the same effect as the massive Soviet troop movement into Hungary on the night of 30th/31st October 1956; in each case the end of a reform movement was at hand.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Dr. William Juhasz, Hungarian Social Science Reader (1945-63), (New York: Aurora Editions, 1965), pp. 302-21.

I. Genesis and Programmes

The proposals and guidelines for the reform movement was drafted in a single basis platform - the Action Programme of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia by the reformers.<sup>3</sup> By 6th February it was completed and was approved by the Czechoslovak party on 5th April 1968 and by the semi-autonomous Slovak party on the 23rd and 24th April.<sup>4</sup> The central proposals were freedom of speech, assembly, and organisation; freedom of press; freedom of movement inside the country and out; and property rights; complete rehabilitation of Communist and non-Communist victims of Stalinism; federalization of the Czech and Slovak lands and a guarantee of the national life and...national identity of (Czechoslovakia's) Hungarians, Poles, Ukrainians and Germans.<sup>5</sup>

The Hungarians did not have a single document like the Czechoslovakia's Action Programme but it was

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- 3 "The Action Programme of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia", adopted at the Central Committee Plenum on 5th April, 1968, in Paul Ello (ed.), Czechoslovakia's Blueprint for "Freedom", (Washington, D.C.: Aeropolis Books, 1968), pp. 89-178.
- 4 CSSR: The Road to Democratic Socialism Facts on Events from January to May 1968, (Prague: Pragopress Feature, 1968), pp. 93-95.
- 5 Bela K. Kiraly, "Budapest-1956-Prague 1968, Parallels and Contrasts", Problems of Communism, vol. 18, July-October, 1969, pp. 52-60.

incorporated in Imre Nagy's 'New Course' and in a whole series of plans and programmes that were adopted by a variety of social and professional organisations over a period of three-and-a-half years. The most outstanding of these plans were outlined in the "Dissertations" that Imre Nagy, first presented to the Central Committee of the Hungarian Workers' (Communist) Party in 1955 and again when he was suspended from the Party in 1956.<sup>6</sup> The reformers' position was finally synthesized in the Sixteen Point Programme proclaimed by the university students on 22nd October, 1956.<sup>7</sup>

So far as the reform movements were concerned two major outside influences contributed to their genesis. The first of these was Yugoslavia's example of an independent road to socialism. Tito's successful defiance of Stalin indicated that there was not only a theoretical alternative to the Soviet model - but a very real - and workable one as well. The Yugoslav example, however was only an 'ignis fatuus' for Hungary

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<sup>6</sup> Imre Nagy on Communism in, Defense of the New Course, (New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1957).

<sup>7</sup> Report of the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary, New York, United Nations General Assembly, Eleventh Session, Supplement No. 18/A/3592, 1957, p. 69.

and Czechoslovakia, quite beyond the realm of reality. Belgrade had the inestimable advantage of having been drummed out of the socialist community by Moscow itself and so could scarcely be made subject to the doctrine of the "socialist commonwealth" by which Moscow had sought to justify its intervention in Czechoslovakia.

The other major factor that affected the course of events in Hungary and Czechoslovakia was the changes that had been taking place in the Soviet Union itself since the death of Stalin. The collective leadership that had succeeded Stalin's personal dictatorship was rent by internecine feuding. These clashes of ideas and personalities absorbed much of the new leaders' energies, loosening direct control over the satellites and weakening totalitarian rule inside the country. The piecemeal changes within the Soviet Union finally affected the most vulnerable of all the East European satellites: Hungary. Matyas Rakosi's Stalinist regime was condemned in a Party Central Committee Meeting in June 1953 and the "June Resolutions", which contained the elements of Imre Nagy's "New Course" was promulgated.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bela K. Kiraly, "Budapest 1956-Prague 1968, Parallels and Contrasts", Problems of Communism vol. 18, July-October 1969, p. 56.

Imre Nagy's "New Course" advocated no forceful collectivization, membership of the peasants in cooperatives became voluntary, more consumer goods were made available to the people; abolition of police terror.<sup>9</sup> It was a modest start in the process of liberalization in Hungary.

Nikita Khrushchev's address to the 20th Soviet Party Congress on February 25th, 1956,<sup>10</sup> had an enormous impact as much in the Communist World, as beyond. Khrushchev launched an attack on the "cult of personality", but he failed to denounce totalitarianism itself. His epoch-making speech, and indeed the whole 20th Party Congress and its aftermath were thus full of contradictions

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9 An interesting account of Soviet destalinisation and its repercussions in Hungary in Paul Kecskemeti, "Limits and Problems of Decompression: The Case of Hungary", The Annals (Philadelphia), May 1958: excerpts are reprinted in Imre Kovacs (ed.), Facts about Hungary: The Fight for Freedom, New York, The Hungarian Committee, 1966, pp. 67-68.

10 Secret speech of Khrushchev Concerning the 'Cult of the Individual' Delivered at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union", in Russian Institute of Columbia University (eds.) The Anti-Stalin Campaign and International Communism, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1957).

but they did at least open the door to change.

The "Action Programme" of Czechoslovakia and the "New Course" of Hungary fifteen years earlier were Eastern Europe's most radical reforms : the Hungarian movement was marked by its innovativeness and initiative, the Czechoslovak by its breadth and comprehensiveness. They differed in their implementation.

The Action Programme was launched by Alexander Dubcek and his associates after they had won key posts in the Party and the state. On the otherhand, Nagy and his followers had to try to carry out their programme with only the executive branch of government in their hands - the Stalinists remained firmly in control of the Party. The Hungarian reform movement faced even greater difficulties after the fall of Nagy's government on 14th April, 1955, which left both the party and the state under Stalinist sway until the outbreak of the revolution in October 1956.

The experience of Czechoslovakia was otherwise. With the reformists well entrenched in the party organisation, the Stalinists became more and more isolated, so that

Dubeck's struggle was not so much with them but with outsiders.

The Czechoslovak movement was able to conduct its activities from key positions within the party and government, while the Hungarian movement was always on the periphery. This distinction is fundamental. In Hungary, the party played an unambiguously reactionary role. It was opposed to the movement from the very start, even when, from June 1953 to March 1955, it formally endorsed its demands.

The price for the lack of a well thought out, coherent and positive programme was paid on 23rd October 1956, when the institutional power collapsed, leaving Hungary in a political void. Even the presence of a programme would have hardly saved the Hungarian revolution.<sup>11</sup> Until January 1968, the situation in Czechoslovakia was similar to that in Hungary in 1956. Much like their Hungarian counterparts, the Czechoslovak intellectuals fought a lonely battle against an entrenched and

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11 Tomas Aczel, "Budapest 1956-Prague 1968, Spokesman of Revolution", Problems of Communism, vol. 18, nos. 4-5, July-October 1969, p. 65.

vindictive party bureaucracy and without the active support of the population at large. After Novotny's fall, however, an entirely new situation came into being. True, the Dubcek leadership did not come from the ranks of the liberal communist intellectuals, and the party apparatus remained largely in the hands of conservative functionaries bent on preserving their prerogatives of power and deeply antagonistic to the goals of the reformers. But the leadership gradually became more and more responsive to the latter's demands and aspirations, with the renunciation of police terror and the growing rapport between the intellectuals and the rest of the society, the movement quickly acquired an altogether different character: it became in effect a "Loyal Opposition", whose tactics alternated between support of the new regime and attacks upon the remnants of the old. The hostility that had characterised the relationship between the party and the intellectuals was replaced by a sense of common values and a consciousness of strength and independence replaced the intellectuals' erstwhile mood of alienation and despair.

Another striking difference between the Hungarian and Czechoslovak movements was that the latter - unlike the former - clearly raised and seriously discussed



the problem of opposition parties in a socialist society. The Czechoslovak intellectuals, operating in a far less inimical political climate, had the time to refine their thinking on some of the more basic implications of their struggle for a "new socialism". Finally, the Czechoslovak intellectuals took an unequivocal stand on the role of the Communist Party in a socialist state. In Hungary, the reformers limited themselves, by and large, to exposing the bankruptcy of the party.

## II. National Fronts

Imre Nagy needed a platform from which the public at large could voice its views, support his "New Course", and assist him in breaking the power of Matyas Rakosi and the Stalinist party apparatus. He chose the Patriotic People's Front - a coalition embracing the Communist party, the trade unions, and intellectual social and professional associations. Under Rakosi, the Patriotic People's Front had been no more than a docile appendage of the Hungarian Workers' Party, a "transmission belt" for conveying the Party's policies to the masses; Nagy reorganised and converted it into a more genuinely representative organ of political action. In October 1954, the Front's Statutory Congress passed a resolution expressing its support to Nagy's programme and to make

its influence felt in all spheres of activity. The "New Course's " liberalising and humanising tendency had thus found expression in a mass organisation that had been reformed in a spirit of pluralism and participation.

Dubcek on the contrary, overseeing his reform programme from a strong position within the party, had no major centre of Stalinist power to combat; rather, his primary concern was to forestall the resurgence of Stalinism. He took two major steps to secure his aim. First, he reorganised the National Front - more or less as Nagy had done. Unlike, Nagy, however, he also tolerated a renaissance of political pluralism that verged on a multi party system.

The Hungarian students' Sixteen-Point Programme had advocated a multi party system. Besides, general elections with universal adult suffrage, secret ballots and the participation of several parties to elect a new parliament was also demanded. Nagy, however, opposed the proposal as an open invitation to Soviet reprisal. Ironically, a multiparty system was not revived in Hungary until after the Soviet Union's bloody intervention.

The main difference between Dubcek's and Nagy's use of extra party organisations was that Nagy prodded the Patriotic People's Front back to life in an effort to induce the Communist Party itself to join the reform movement. Dubcek, on the other hand, restored powers to the National Front and tolerated the revival of a multiparty system after the Communist Party was already in the hands of the reformers.

The tactics of both Nagy and Dubcek were extremely hazardous departures from the Soviet model. To Moscow and its closest allies, one of the most sacred Leninist tenets is that which proclaims the leading role of the party.<sup>12</sup> In Soviet Union, every change permitted by Khrushchev and his successors has taken place under strict party control. The reforms sought by Imre Nagy and Alexander Dubcek were opposed by the Kremlin precisely because they undermined the Party's monolithic authority.

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12 The Change most angrily denounced by the East Germans was the loosening of party control in Czechoslovakia. Walter Ulbricht feared the possibility of a chain reaction that would affect the German Democratic Republic. See, "The Continuous Escalation of Anti-Socialist and Counter-revolutionary Developments in Czechoslovak Socialist Republic", News Deutschland (East Berlin), 25th August, 1968.

### III. Mass Organisations and Social Groups

In both Hungary and Czechoslovakia the intellectuals and the youth came out early as the vanguard of the reform movement. However, in each case the workers joined in more gradually. In Czechoslovakia, apart from the numerous resolutions, manifestos, and declarations issued by factory groups, trade-union locals, and other labour organisations, the most dramatic act on the part of the workers was to screen from foreign observation of Extraordinary Fourteenth Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held at the CKD plant in the Prague suburb of Vysocany on 22nd August, 1968.

Similarly, the Hungarian workers not only joined forces with the intellectuals and youth but also, after the Soviet Union's second intervention, took over the leadership of the revolution, putting up the stiffest resistance and launching nationwide strikes.

### IV. The Climax of the Reform Movement

The peak of the Hungarian reform movement before the outbreak of armed violence was the Petofi Circle's meeting on 27th July, 1956. The climax of the Czechoslovak movement was the publication of two articles :

the "Two Thousand Words" on 27th June, 1968, and a memorial to Imre Nagy on 13th June 1968, the tenth anniversary of his execution.

The Petofi Circle met in the assembly hall of the Officers Club of the People's Army, one of the largest auditoriums in Budapest. During the meeting the Stalinist censorship, the personal failings of the country's leadership and the structural shortcomings of the party were vehemently criticised. The public supported Imre Nagy and endorsed the demands that emanated from the Petofi Circle, but Nagy and his followers were out of office. Once again, the reform movement had to work against the power of the party and the state. This conflict generated enormous tension and directly led to the crisis of 23rd October 1956.

In Czechoslovakia, the diehard reactionary elements had already been defeated by the spring of 1968, so that a confrontation between them and the Liberals, along Hungarian lines, was no longer possible. To be sure, there were differences between the middle-of-the-road reformers who were in charge of the government and the more radical elements within the intelligentsia, labour unions and student youth, but these were differences

of degree rather than principle, and they were devoid of the bitter hostility characterising the relations between the reformers and liberals in Hungary 12 years earlier. The article "Two Thousand Words" called for non-violent mass efforts to accelerate and consummate the evolution towards democracy, it openly warned against attacks on Dubcek, aiming its thrust at the conservative party elements still entrenched in the mass media and in various sectors of public life.<sup>13</sup>

The article on Imre Nagy praised the Hungarian leader for attempting to emulate the Yugoslav system and described him as a "forceful proponent of democratic and national socialism" who "as early as in 1955 expressed that the leading role of the party cannot be sacrosanct but must at all times be checked against actual social conditions".

Budapest in 1956 and Prague in 1968 also demonstrated another lesson - namely, that Moscow remains determined to preserve the essentials of one-party rule, and to

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13 'A "Common Cause", The 2000 Words', Problems of Communism, November-December, 1968, pp. 12-13.

keep the East European bloc under its control by whatever means possible. It is the continuing conflict between these two forces - the indigenous pressures for internal liberalisation and national independence, and the dogged determination of the Soviet rulers to preserve the status quo - that will shape the destiny of Eastern Europe.

However, both Hungary and Czechoslovakia wanted to create a humane and moral socialist society. Both ultimately borrowed a great deal from the liberal and socialist conceptions of the 18th and 19th centuries. They succeeded in setting invaluable historical precedents and guidelines for the continuing struggle of free peoples against totalitarian dictatorship.

CHAPTER - V



## PERESTROIKA AND ITS IMPACT ON EASTERN EUROPE - AN OVERVIEW

In the wake of recent changes in Eastern Europe, it is quite indicative, as a matter of fact that Stalinist model of socialism, in its entirety, has failed. Pertinent to such failure has been the fact of accumulated discontent among the people of Eastern Europe. Socialistic and democratic norms along with an economic viability which it had promised could not be realized. In this context, the uprisings in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, in particular and East Europe, in general, merit an academic analysis. With the passage of time these societies became more and more autocratic and totalitarian. Thus the uprisings were a fight against totalitarianism which brought misery to the people where the standard of living was a degenerated one and the dignity of the individual was a far-fetched myth.

The reform experiments initiated by Gorbachev in order to restructure the Soviet society blew over to East Europe and completely changed the socio-political scenario within a short span of time. A major overhaul was long overdue in Eastern Europe. And perestroika served as an effective catalyst. Keeping in view the changes this chapter seeks to examine the systemic

changes that came as a result of perestroika.

In the aftermath of the 1956 de-Stalinisation campaign in the Soviet Union, reformist elements gained the upper hand in Poland and Hungary. Czechoslovakia's 1968 "Prague spring" followed Soviet economic reforms in the mid-1960s. But in no case these changes lasted long. In 1956 reformism in Hungary turned into a popular revolution that prompted Soviet intervention, while the initial gains of the 1956 "Polish October" gradually disappeared. In 1968, another military intervention - "justified" by the Brezhnev Doctrine - put an end to Czechoslovakia's economic and political reform movement. In the past, then, while reform in the Soviet Union proved to be manageable or even reversible, the pressure for change in Eastern Europe proved to be uncontrollable.

The Polish and the Hungarian regimes in Gorbachev's initiatives an implicit approval of their own policies and ambitions. Yet even these two regimes, and certainly all others, except Romania, preferred to praise "promising developments" in the Soviet Union without necessarily seeing them as a guide for their own course or undertaking

similar initiatives themselves. Their initial reluctance was for the following considerations.<sup>1</sup>

Firstly, most leaders in this region remained skeptical about Gorbachev's chances to implement his programme in the Soviet Union itself - or, for that matter, to stay in power beyond the 1980s. They tended to assume that his tenure as the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) would be short-lived. Even reform-minded officials, those who shared Gorbachev's ideas doubted if Gorbachev could decentralize the Soviet economy, modify the present system of subsidies and alter the artificial pricing system. Given such skepticism about both the realism of Gorbachev's programme and his staying power, most East European politicians understandably assumed a wait-and-see attitude.

Secondly, domestic political conditions made it very difficult for the East European regimes to emulate the Soviet Union. For which Gorbachev's momentum in good part derived from his ability to criticize his predecessors' faults. Eastern Europe's leaders - with

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1 Charles Gati, "Gorbachev and Eastern Europe", Foreign Affairs (New York), vol.65, no.5, Summer 1987, p. 959.

the exception of Poland's - simply do not have a Brezhnev or a Konstantin Chernenko to blame for current problems.

Thirdly, the risk of instability associated with perestroika is much higher in Eastern Europe than in the Soviet Union. The Soviet system appears to enjoy considerable domestic support, especially among ethnic Russians; the same cannot be said about any of the East European systems. Forty years of Communist rule have not perceptibly improved the standing of the East European leaders with the vast majority of their people, young and old, who continue to dream of a European, perhaps an Austrian or Finnish-future.

Any reform in Eastern Europe carries with it the risk of being, and being seen as, too little and too late fuelling spontaneous demands for fundamental change. If the region's Communist regimes were to open the valves of liberalization, people would press for liberty; if democratization were in vogue, they would ask for democracy. If these regimes were to pursue perestroika and resist glasnost - modify the economy without tolerating a more open political environment - the people would call for political pluralism. Indeed,

any change introduced by the region's authorities would generate demands for more - more democracy, more independence, more consumer goods, higher living standards. This is why the East European regimes are so reluctant to adopt Gorbachev's programme; they knew that in their part of the world any change, especially the type of rapid and radical change Gorbachev proposed, carried with it the danger of political turbulence.

However, the need for a change became inevitable as a result of the poor performance of the East European economies and the increasing technological challenge from the West. This has forced many East European countries to modify key aspects of central planning and introduce market oriented practices. Economic reform, moreover, has become increasingly linked to political reform. In Hungary and Poland, for instance, an important debate on power sharing has begun to emerge. Gorbachev's ultimate aim appears to be a more economically efficient Eastern bloc, one closely associated with the Soviet Union but economically less dependent on it - and less of a drain on Soviet resources. He would also like to see a reduction in East-West tension to permit a diversion of resources from the military to

the civilian economies, a goal which is strongly shared by many of his East European allies, particularly Hungary and Poland.

As part of this restructuring, Gorbachev has initiated changes in three broad areas: political relations, the economy, and the military security area.

In the political arena, Gorbachev is willing to grant East European leaders greater flexibility and freedom to decide their own affairs - as long as their efforts do not directly contradict or undercut Soviet interests. Allies have been allowed and even encouraged to develop their own ideas and show greater initiative, especially in disarmament matters and relations with Western Europe.

There is also greater recognition and tolerance - of the diversity within the bloc. The Soviet experience is no longer the only model of socialism. Indeed, the idea of an officially sanctioned model typical of the Stalin era and less directly of the Khrushchev, and Brezhnev eras as well, has been largely abandoned. As Gorbachev stressed during his visit to Prague in April 1987 ,  
"No one has the right to claim a special position in the

socialist world".<sup>2</sup> At the sametime greater recognition has been given to "national peculiarities" and the traditions of other socialist states. In his speech commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution on November 2, 1987, Gorbachev noted: "Unity does not mean identity or uniformity". In short, the Soviet Union no longer claims that there is a single path to socialism or one model which is universally valid. Each party has the right to decide how socialism should best be developed in its own country, taking into consideration its own national circumstances as well as its obligations to the socialist community as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

Perestroika is squarely responsible in shaping the economic relations between Soviet and East Europe. While Gorbachev has not forced the Soviet model of reform on his allies, he has made clear that the East European economies must be restructured to make them more efficient and more competitive. On the one hand, he has stepped up pressure on his East European allies to increase the quality of the manufactured goods they export to the Soviet Union; on the other, he has made clear that Moscow is no longer willing to provide Eastern Europe with raw materials and energy at previous levels.

2. Stephen, F. Larrabee, "Perestroika Shakes Eastern Europe", Bulletin of Atomic Scientists (New York), vol. 45, no.2, March 1989, p. 26.

3. Ibid., p. 26.

Gorbachev favours closer integration and the creation of a useful internal market within Council For Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), however, it does not mean that he favours autarky or wishes to restrict East European economic ties to the West. On the contrary, his push for economic restructuring within the Comecon has gone hand in hand with an effort to integrate the Soviet economy and those of the East European allies more closely into the world economy. Gorbachev has not only encouraged East Europeans to expand bilateral economic ties with Western Europe but he has also pushed for closer multilateral cooperation with the West. The June 1988 agreement normalizing relations between the European Economic Community and Comecon is an important example of the effort to expand economic ties to the West and integrate the Comecon status into the world economy.

Gorbachev has also initiated important changes in military security policy. While Moscow remains the main determiner of security policy within the Warsaw Pact, Gorbachev has given his East European allies



a freer hand to develop their own arms control initiatives as long as they do not directly contradict Soviet interests. When Jaruzelski launched his own plan on conventional arms control, it differed in some aspects from official Soviet policy at the time.<sup>4</sup> Czechoslovakia and East Germany have also proposed the creation of a nuclear-free corridor in Europe. While initiatives are in line with Soviet policy, they also reflect specific national interests and give the East European countries an opportunity to make their own contribution to East-West detente.

The central principles of intra bloc relations seem to be under revision. Before the Gorbachev era the principle of 'socialist internationalism' was a ritual catchword in speeches and articles, discussing Soviet relations with East Europe. It was missing, however, from Gorbachev's maiden speech in which he assigned 'first priority' to relations within the 'socialist Commonwealth'.<sup>5</sup>

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4 Andrezej Karkoszka, "Merits of the Jaruzelski Plan", Bulletin September 1988, p. 33.

5 David. S. Mason, "Glasnost, Perestroika and Eastern Europe", International Affairs (London), vol.64, no.3, Summer 1988, p. 435.

Over the last 40 years the most dramatic initiatives for change have come from Eastern Europe, not the Soviet Union and when incentives for change have come from Moscow, for example with Khrushchev's speech to the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, East European responses have outpaced the Soviets.

After discussing the whole course of change, its reasons and historical background, it will be worthwhile to discuss the changes that are taking place in East European countries individually.

#### POLAND

Poland has always been an exception in the Soviet bloc. Since 1981, it is Poland which crushed Solidarity and imposed martial law and yet which now tolerated a flourishing underground press and left its most outspoken political opponents at large. Poland has also the freest press in the communist world, so it is a kind of benchmark for glasnost in the Soviet bloc. It was the Jaruzelski regime which had been the most vocal supporter of the Soviet reforms, which served to legitimize the limited autonomy and liberalization that the Poles have managed to secure.

The Polish press gladly welcomed Soviet reforms

more than any other East European country and published Gorbachev's major speeches and CPSU resolutions and the literature of perestroika and glasnost were translated into Polish.

The Polish reaction, more than any other, illustrates the symbiotic nature of the process of reform in Moscow and Eastern Europe. Soviet leaders openly discussed their interest in Polish reforms, and the Poles had been capitalising on the Soviet reforms to push ahead their own. Polish officials have described developments in Poland and the Soviet Union as a process of "mutual influencing".<sup>6</sup> The new Soviet law on enterprises was partly based on the experience of the socialist countries, including Poland, and that a number of elements of the new Soviet law were based on the Polish law on enterprises. In Moscow it is no secret that during his recent visit to Warsaw Premier Ryzhkov was interested in the details of the Polish economic reforms. The Poles have had a decentralising economic reform on the books since 1982, but they have had little success in implementing it, partly because of bureaucratic inertia and partly because of conservative opposition. Gorbachev's

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6 Polish Situation Report/3, 12 March 1987.

reforms and his railings against bureaucratic resistance in the Soviet Union will have the effect of encouraging the reformers and muting their opponents in Poland. The Soviet leaders have sometimes even encouraged the Polish liberals directly. An article in the Soviet Party monthly Kommunist on the Polish Party Congress asserted that 'the Party.....can-not arbitrarily without considering the situation, set tasks which are correct from the point of view of Marxist-Leninist theory, but which are impracticable in the given concrete circumstances.'<sup>7</sup>

The Polish regime has been greatly influenced by the Soviet reform movement in a number of fronts, in the economy, glasnost and democratization. The 1982 economic reform, which provided for enterprise autonomy, self-financing and self-management had stagnated with minor genuine progress. However, it was revitalised in 1986 when Jaruzelski announced a 'second stage' of the reform and set up a Commission on Economic Reform to supervise its implementation. According to him the new economic policies would 'eliminate' the present 'centralistic model that has not passed the test of time'

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7 Karen Dawisha and Jonathan Valdez, "Socialist Internationalism in Eastern Europe", Problems of Communism (Washington), vol.36, no.2, March-April 1987, p. 7.

and would rely heavily on market mechanisms.<sup>8</sup> Wladyslaw Baka, head of the Polish National Bank, said, 'there is no doubt that the process Gorbachev has initiated in the Soviet Union has been a very strong support for the pro-reform sector in Poland.'<sup>9</sup>

The Poles have also carried out some limited political reforms. A new law on 'public consultations and referendums aimed at broadening of citizens' direct participation in the exercise of power pre-empted the new Soviet law on referendums by several months.<sup>10</sup>

"Reforms are an objective necessity", said General Jaruzelski, in his closing speech to the central committee meeting, which was called to adopt a position on the reform policies following the referendum.<sup>11</sup>

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8 Wall Street Journal (New York), 30 July, 1986.

9 Washington Post, 7 April 1987.

10 Polish Situation Report/4, 10 April, 1987.

11 Indian Express (New Delhi) 17 December, 1987.

The Polish Communist Party in the face of rising demands for political pluralism agreed to create an upper Chamber of parliament in a open and free elections. Poland called for steps towards freeing the media and the Solidarity, communist world's first free trade union, which was banned in October 1982 was recognised as a free trade union and it registered as a political party on the 17th April, 1989.<sup>12</sup>

The winds of change have defeated the ruling Communist Party in elections in Poland and have assured the supremacy of the Solidarity. Under the Polish electoral system, as many as 65 per cent of the 460 seats in the Sejm (lower house) were reserved for the Communist Party and its affiliates while the election to the 100 members strong Senate (upper house) was completely free.

The elections have swept the Solidarity-led opposition in a commanding position to play a crucial role in the selection of a new leader. The Communist Party no longer holds the key to shaping the country's political future. The elections have brought Poland virtually to

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12 Times of India (New Delhi), 15 March 1989.

a two-party system. It should be clear now to General Jaruzelski and his colleagues that the answer to Poland's political and economic ailments did not lie in the suppression of Solidarity and trade unions.<sup>13</sup>

#### HUNGARY

The ideas and innovations for Gorbachev's economic reforms owes heavily to the Hungarian New Economic Mechanism (NEM) of 1968. In turn, the Soviet reforms have given a boost to those Hungarians who even talk of more widespread changes to overcome the economic stagnation of recent years.

Most of the Soviet economic reform proposals are similar to those in Hungary - the provisions on bankruptcy of inefficient enterprises, on work place election of enterprise directors (adopted in Hungary in 1984), and on joint operations with Western firms.

AS compared to the Poles, the Hungarian response to Soviet perestroika has been less vocal. They have preferred the relative anonymity of cultivating their

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13 National Herald (New Delhi), 9 June 1989.

own garden to the risky role of being innovative model-builders.<sup>14</sup> However, both at the official and dissident level they have supported the Gorbachev initiatives.

The low productivity and growth rate and a mounting foreign debt, has, however, compelled the Hungarians to use the opportunity and stimulus given by Soviet reforms. In the process they have launched a number of new economic reforms and an austerity programme. Five new commercial banks will compete with the Central Bank and the job of lending money to state enterprises has been removed from the Central Bank. An economic stabilization programme announced by the Central Committee, in the summer of 1987 calls for 'development of the market by observing its rules'. The new programme will provide greater wage differentiation based on performance, foster more cooperative arrangements with foreign companies, allow a greater role for profits, and encourage private enterprise by increasing the number of people allowed to work in a private business.<sup>15</sup> The austerity measures

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14 Bennett Kovrig, "Hungarian Socialism: The Deceptive Hybrid", Eastern European Politics and Societies (Berkeley, California), no. 1, Winter 1987, p. 130.

15 Hungarian Situation Report/ 7. 22 July 1987.



include price increases and the first comprehensive personal income tax in a communist country.

So far as political reforms are concerned, the main goal of the Hungarian people and opposition is the establishment of a pluralist parliamentary democracy. For the first time the opposition groups have created a broad political front. It includes representatives from 'democratic opposition', environmental groups and Church leaders.

Veteran leader Janos Kadar has been replaced by Premier Karoly Grosz as the Communist Party Chief, due to his vehement opposition to the reform movement.

In an atmosphere of increasing freedom of expression, Hungarians are looking forward to the possibility that after 44 years of Communist rule the Party may permit free elections that could one day drive it from power. Hungary is heading towards multi party politics under official promises to convert the Communist system modelled on the Soviet Union's into a more democratic society and freer economy.<sup>16</sup>

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16 International Herald Tribune (Paris), 16 May 1989.

Four of the political parties that were dissolved by the Communists four decades ago have come back to life and new political organisations that intend to constitute themselves as parties have been legally formed.

Mechanisms are being prepared that are to lead this year or next to a law establishing the rights of parties, parliamentary elections, and framing of a more democratic constitution.

The Hungarian parliament passed legislation that would lead to the country's first and free elections in 42 years. Earlier it had also voted to disband an unpopular militia created in 1956 and declared a general rehabilitation for thousands of people persecuted under Communist Party rule. These actions came a day after the parliament voted to legalize opposition political parties and two days after the 1949 constitution was amended to declare Hungary a democratic republic.

The new parliament will have 386 seats - 176 elected directly as independents, at Constituency level, 152 by proportional representation on a district level and 58

on a national list. All seats were contested in the election, which were held before June 1990.<sup>17</sup>

The parliament had ordered the ruling Communist Party to start disbanding its organisations in shops and factory floors. The parliament also established the office of the President of the republic, which will replace the 21-man collective Presidency.

The Interior Ministry said it would return all samizdat or underground publishing, materials and printing machines that the police seized from the independent writers and publishers from 1983 to 1988. One of the best known samizdat journals, Beszeloe, is now legally sold on Hungarian newsstands and published regularly.

Perhaps the most far-reaching reform of late is legislation concerning the formation of associations and the holding of demonstrations. A new law has also been passed which allows people to form 'unofficial' organisations and to hold demonstrations as long as they in

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17. International Herald Tribune (Paris) 22 October 1989.

no way threaten state security, public order or the rights of others.

It was in March this year that the Hungarians went to polls, country's first free election in 40 years. The purpose of the election - the first of the two stage polling process - was to enable the electorate to winnow the 50 contending parties down to a more manageable six for the final contest on 8th April.

The March election left the "Democratic Forum" and the "Free Democrats" with 24.7 per cent and 21.4 per cent vote respectively and the April election has put them in the Government and opposition respectively. The clearest message of the election was an emphatic repudiation of the left. Reformed Communists, who gave themselves the name of Socialists in the wake of Hungary's October Revolution, got only 10.9 per cent of the vote, while the hardliners of the erstwhile Communist Party who now call themselves Hungarian Socialist Workers Party were virtually wiped out of the new Hungarian political landscape receiving only 3.7 per cent of the vote.

Prime Minister Joseph Antall, leader of Democratic

Forum, seriously aims Hungary to retain its typical traditional character even while adopting free market principles. The new Democratic Forum government has, however, called for a thorough going reform of both the economic and political sphere. Recently, the frontier of liberalisation have been extended to the media and foreign investment has generated deeper and more publicly into newspapers. This has prompted the government to set up a Committee to investigate media privatisation.

#### CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The response in Czechoslovakia has, however, been equally favourable and has been accompanied by major new reform programmes. For Czechoslovakia, a country mired in rigidity and dogmatism since the crushing of the Prague Spring 20 years ago, the changes are far reaching and startling.

The initial response of Prague to perestroika was not very welcoming. Some of Gorbachev's speeches that contained criticism of central planning and bureaucratization were even censored or altered before appearing in the Czechoslovak press. In mid-1985, Party leader Husak asserted that 'we will not take any of

the roads of market oriented concepts.....we have had bad experiences with that kind of thing". By 17th Party Congress in March 1986, however, there had been a change. Husak started 'we are not afraid of any reforms.....we follow what they are doing in the USSR and we look for our own solutions.'<sup>18</sup> A relatively radical reform programme adopted at the Congress was, according to Prime Minister Lubomir Strougal, 'in its basic features identical with the aims pursued also by the Soviet comrades in their restructuring.'<sup>19</sup>

By the beginning of 1987 glasnost and perestroika were in full bloom in Czechoslovakia and the Czechoslovak media had stepped up coverage of the Soviet reform programme. Gorbachev's programme also struck a responsive chord in the Czech and Slovak population.

The Czechoslovak economic reforms adopted at the seventeenth Party Congress and reaffirmed in the January 1987 'Principles of Economic Restructuring' call for a 'comprehensive experiment' to be carried out

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18 Background Report/1 (Prague), 3 January 1987.

19 Czechoslovak Situation Report/2, 6 February 1987.

for three years and, if successful to be introduced throughout the economy in 1990. The reform looks much the same as the Soviet one, with a reduction in central planning, economic accountability for enterprises, and fuller enterprise autonomy. Pay will vary according to performance, and enterprises will be able to export directly without going through government ministries. The government has also begun debate on a new law on state enterprises, similar to both the Polish and Soviet bills, which would provide for work place self-management and elections of directions.<sup>20</sup>

Gustav Husak, the head of the country's Communist Party, who resisted all kinds of reform attempts after 1968 gave way for Milos Jakes in the face of rising demands for change. Inspired by Mr. Gorbachev's programme of perestroika, the Prague version presently foresees a more modest decentralisation of economic administration than that adopted by Moscow.<sup>21</sup>

So far as political reforms are concerned democracy has become the catchword. People of all

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20 Dawisha and Valdez, n.7, pp. 4-10 and Czechoslovak Situation Report, 17 January, 1987.

21 International Herald Tribune (Paris) 18 December 1987.

walks of life wanted democracy and a free life, free from the clutches of the government.

There were large scale demonstrations for free and fair elections, freedom of the media, multiparty system, etc. headed by the opposition leader Vaclav Havel, a play wright and a member of the UN Human Rights group "Charter 77".

The Czechoslovak leadership on the face of large scale uprising agreed to propose the elimination of the Communist Party's monopoly over political power and initiated moves for a coalition government that would include other political parties.

After 41 years of Communist rule a new era began on December 10th, 1989 in Czechoslovakia, when a coalition government of "national understanding" was sworn in and the last remnant of Stalinist era, Gustav Husak, resigned.<sup>22</sup> The only Czechoslovak opposition party, the 'Civic Forum' comprising students and intellectuals was responsible for the change. The Communist-dominated parliament

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22 Christian Science Monitor, 15 December 1989.



unanimously elected a non-Communist, Vaclav Havel, leader of Civic Forum, as President.

### BULGARIA

Initial Bulgarian response was quite hostile to Moscow but gradually due to domestic compulsions it fell in behind the Soviet line of reform. At the January 1986 Bulgarian Central Committee Plenum, Party leader Zhivkov admitted that 'for us, a new economic, political and ideological climate is necessary and we must create it at any cost.' The Bulgarian media have given extensive coverage to the Soviet reforms and have published Gorbachev's major speeches in full.<sup>23</sup>

In 1986 began widespread discussions and numerous proposals for a reform based more firmly on market principles. Like Czechoslovakia, there was apparently considerable opposition to this though, apparently under the Soviet stimulus, the reformers eventually won out. The regime has begun a set of major Soviet style reforms, including enterprise self-management, election of management by workers, the establishment

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23 Bulgarian Situation Report/1, 13 February 1987.

of commercial banks, and greater latitude of private production.

The Bulgarians after their meeting with Gorbachev in Moscow in October 1987, were convinced that 'new model of socialism' can be constructed stage by stage.<sup>24</sup>

The wings of change blowing from the east made possible a situation conducive for a free and fair election after nearly five decades. The ruling reformed communists in Bulgaria have won a popular mandate to continue running the country defying the general East European trend of sweeping the old communists away. The people have rejected the motley crowd of dissidents who had sought to challenge the government under the banner of the Union of Democratic Forces. It was formed in December and consisted of at least sixteen parties and movements ranging from social democrats to Christian activists and environmentalists.

It is led by a former academic and lacklustre personality, Dr. Zhelyu Zhelev. Another opposition

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24 Christian Science Monitor, 25 February, 1988.

Party in the fray was the Bulgarian Agrarian Party which was earlier subservient to the Communist Party but broke away after the fall of Mr. Todor Zhivkov. The fourth group was the Movement for Rights Freedom which draws support from the Turkish and Muslim minorities who account for ten per cent of the population.

The Bulgarian opposition unlike in Poland and Czechoslovakia lacked a charismatic leader. Even in Czechoslovakia according to the latest figures, the Communist secured the second place, although a distant one, beating the Christian Democrats. The Bulgarian Communist Party while changing its name gave up communist orthodoxy and now claims to be a "Marxist Party of Democratic Socialism". As the Bulgarian Socialist Party it is led by Mr. Alexander Lilov, who until seven years ago, was the Chief ideologist of the communist party.

The task of the new government will be a difficult one as the country has to be salvaged from an economic ruin. Seventy per cent of the country's economy is tied to the Soviet Union. In bilateral economic relations too, it has to pay the price of the economic reforms in the Soviet Union in the hard currency which will be needed to pay for those goods that cannot be covered

in barter. The country has a foreign debt of nearly \$10 million and an industry that is outmoded and incapable of producing anything that can earn foreign exchange.

No wonder, the winning party in Bulgaria is already talking of a coalition government because the government will have to make many painful economic choices and take unpopular decisions. The closure of some factories and a rise in unemployment usually follow economic reforms.<sup>25</sup>

#### EAST GERMANY

East Germany and Romania have stubbornly resisted implementing glasnost and perestroika in their own countries, though for different reasons. The East Germans apparently felt that their economy was successful enough not to need any further reform, while Romania simply resented outside efforts to influence his country and erode his own power. Nevertheless, the Soviet reforms have had some influence in both countries.

The major stimulus for economic reform and therefore for glasnost has been the flagging of economic growth

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25 Times of India (New Delhi), 12 June 1990.

throughout Eastern Europe. The GDR however, has the most successful economy and the highest standard of living in the bloc. The Honecker regime instituted limited economic reforms as early as the 1970s, including some decentralization to 'combines' and the 'regional agricultural cooperatives'.

Despite the Honecker regimes resistance to Soviet style economic reform and glasnost, the more relaxed atmosphere in the Soviet Union does seem to have affected East Germany.

The East Germans have of late rejected the Honecker regime for not acting positively to the winds of change blowing from the east and the most historic incident in the post war Germany is the breaking of the Berlin wall and the question of German reunification.

The first and in all probability the last free elections in separate East Germany in 18th March ended in a resounding victory for the Centre-Right Alliance for Germany. Consisting of three partners (the Christian Democratic Union, the German Social Union and Democratic Awakening) the Alliance, which enjoyed the backing of Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his ruling West German

Christian Democratic Party, won nearly 50 per cent vote. The elections obliterated the East German Communist Party of Democratic Socialism and gave a rousing start to Kohl's bid to become the first Chancellor of a United Germany, possibly early next year.<sup>26</sup>

#### ROMANIA

From the beginning in Romania President Ceausescu staunchly opposed the Gorbachev style reforms in spite of a jaundiced economy and vehement criticism and pressure from the Soviet leadership. Soviet-Romanian relations have been frosty, largely because of Romania's refusal to abide by the Soviet line in foreign policy. Under Gorbachev, dissatisfaction with Romania had spread to Ceausescu's internal policies as well, and the feeling were apparently mutual. Ceausescu was the last of the bloc leaders to visit Gorbachev in Moscow (in May 1986) and Romania was the last bloc country for Gorbachev to visit (May 1987), though that was the first visit by a Soviet leader in eleven years.

Gorbachev called for a reversal of 'outmoded concepts'

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26 The Hindu (New Delhi), 29 March 1990.

that increased production goals at the expense of people's living standards, in obvious reference to the current situation in Romania. Ceausescu has continued to emphasize each country's right to pursue its own road to socialism and therefore rejects Moscow's efforts to get other countries to pursue its path, reformist or not. The Romanian media had largely ignored the Soviet domestic reforms, and anti-Soviet commentary was common.

Infant mortality in Romania is the highest in Europe -despite a government programme of population increase demanding five children from every women of child bearing age and forbidding abortions as well as contraceptives. The growth rate had reached a abysmal low, the living standard of the people was worse, foreign debt had reached astronomical figures, even though Ceaucescu claimed that his was an economy having a good health and consistently closing all doors for the possibility of a economic reform in the Soviet line.

The Romanian press was completely dead to the happenings and changes in the other East European countries. It was silent about the breaking of the historic Berlin wall, so also was its reaction to the

winds of changes in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. It also remained silent about the fate of Eric Honecker, Ceausescu's most faithful ally.

Mass upsurge was inevitable in the face of such an unhealthy and undemocratic atmosphere. Nearly 5000 people gathered in the Heroes' Square to protest against President Ceausescu's crackdown in Romania.

This had, however, led to the confrontation between Ceausescu's secret police and the demonstrators in the small town of Timisoara leading to one of the bloodiest episodes after Second World War. Nearly a million people died in the clash and more than that were injured. However, it was the people, the demonstrators, the freedom lovers who became victorious, Ceausescu along with his wife was executed and their wealth was confiscated on charges of "particularly grave crimes" and in the process the remnants of the Stalinist regime were wiped out.

In the May election the Romanians have given an overwhelming vote to the former Communist leaders in the first free election to be held in the country in the past five decades. The country's popular choice for the Presidency, it turns out, is the interim



president, Mr. Ion Iliescu, who was once a Secretary of the Central Committee of the party.<sup>27</sup>

The people rejected the anti Communist Liberal Party and the National Peasant's Party, the two rivals of the ruling National Salvation Front has dominated the country's political life after violent revolution in December last that led to the execution of the despised Mr. Ceaucescu and his wife.

Romania has thus upset the trend set by East Germany and Hungary, both of which ushered in right centre governments by voting against the old communists. The post-election Romania has thus posed a challenge to the western nations committed to assist democratic East European countries. "We are also the people", the Romanians may remind western governments. The issue is crucial since without western aid, the new government of Romania will find it difficult to sustain any improvement of the present dangerous economic situation.

The people opted for the National Salvation Party

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27 Times of India (New Delhi), 23 May 1990.

perhaps for three reasons. They are accustomed to side with authority and the Front represented authority. They were also impressed by the popular measures taken by the Iliescu government which provided them some relief on the prices and food front. By voting for the front they also indicated their preference for some continuity. The oppressive communist regime has gone and their basic needs are being met and they did not want any uncertainty of any radical change.<sup>28</sup>

Alongwith the victory of President Ion Iliescu and his National Salvation Front, an ethnic Hungarian party (The Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania representing one of the country's biggest ethnic minorities) was set to be the main opposition in a parliament-dominated by the Front.

In the recent past the happenings in East Europe reinforced the fact that socialism had failed to provide a better alternative of living. It had failed to fulfill the basic needs of human beings. The central command economy and its excessive thrust on basic and heavy

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28 Times of India (New Delhi), 24 May 1990.

industries were fetters to economic growth and production of consumer goods. These led to large-scale unemployment and poverty which, in turn was responsible for the increasing social evils. So far as political life was concerned, the democratic content in socialism disappeared leading to concentration of power and ultimately to dictatorship, as in the case of Romania. Since long East Europe was in need of democracy and better standard of living-perestroika promised the same. So the reasons for the recent changes in East Europe could be attributed to perestroika.

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## CONCLUSION

The Stalinist model of socialism has lost its ground in almost all the East European countries. Freedom and democracy has become a reality. At this point of time the Soviet reform initiatives plays a stellar role in bringing about the changes smoothly. perestroika, as was discussed in the preceeding chapters, assures democratization of the society, otherwise, autocratic and totalitarian. The backbone of this new thinking is the recognition of the priority of human values, or, to be more precise, of humankind's survival. In its humane social thrust the present course is not only a direct sequel to the great accomplishments started by Lenin but also an extension and a development of the main ideas of the revolution.

Perestroika has brought the Soviet socialism - democracy, people's power, social justice and human rights. The key to achieving the tasks of perestroika has been to overcome the alienation of man from property, by dismantling administrative system, transforming production relations, giving scope to various forms of socialist property, orienting the market

and commodity money relations towards the consumer.

Perestroika or restructuring is not new to the socialist world. Way back in 1956 Hungary endeavoured to reform socialism and endow it with a human face - it advocated democratization of all the socio-economic and political life. Twelve years later Czechoslovakia went the Hungarian way. But the movements for restoration of democracy were ruthlessly suppressed by Soviet Union.

It was Hungarian Communist Party Chief, Imre Nagy, who first exposed the loopholes of Stalinist model of socialism. On the contrary, he championed the cause of democracy and a free society. He advocated an alternative model of socialism with maximum democracy which Stalinist model failed to provide. Similar was the case with Alexander Dubcek, the Czechoslovak party head. He advocated freedom of press, a decentralised economy, better standard of living and a comparatively free society.

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In the eighties perestroika has completely revolutionised the socialist structure that existed

and operated in East Europe. It has given due credit to the reform initiatives of Nagy and Dubcek and has advocated the inevitability of a fundamental change of a such a socialist model. The major point of resentment among the people of East Europe was the excessive thrust of socialist economy towards industrialisation at the cost of the production of consumer goods. It never missed a single word in criticizing the central command economic structure which was responsible for the large-scale economic stagnation. It was understood that the lack of proper autonomy of the workers' council, undue censorship and the monolithic party structure had gradually lessened the democratic content inherent in socialism and was responsible for its departure towards dictatorship. So perestroika as the blueprint for a new social order has been welcomed by all sections of the people in East Europe.

The result was a major overhauling of the socio-political and economic life in East Europe. So far as political life is concerned, the Stalinists have been shown a backseat in almost all the East European countries. For the first time they experienced the revered democratic values of multiparty democracy and

universal adult suffrage, etc. In the economic sphere, it experienced a departure from the central command economy to a more decentralised one with special attention towards consumer products and collaboration with private concerns in some specific areas. In the social sphere, greater importance is being given to freedom of press and eradication of social evils like drug addiction and drunkenness etc.

Hungary and Czechoslovakia have remained the two pioneering countries so far as innovative reform experiments are concerned, may it be 1956 or 1968 developments. They are also one of two most ardent supporters of Gorbachev's reform initiatives. In fact, these were the first two countries to renounce the Soviet model of socialism and advocated an alternative to it. In the wake of recent changes, Hungary and Czechoslovakia were among the first countries to adopt a democratic form of government. The one party domination gave way to a multiparty democracy with universal adult suffrage. However, the point that comes immediate into perspective is the future of these democracies. It is not yet clear the direction these countries may eventually be taking, whether they are going to adopt a western model of liberal democracy or march towards



a democratic socialism or prepare a model of democracy which will typically suit these societies is something which lay in future.

Speculations on any one of the above questions will be premature as both Hungary and Czechoslovakia are in a transitional stage. The socio-political and economic developments are in a constant state of flux, they have not yet attained the level of reasonable maturity on whose basis something concrete can be pronounced at this stage.

The theoretical and conceptual framework of perestroika owes its genesis to the Marxist-Leninist concept of socialist democracy. The essence of Marxist-Leninist concept of socialist democracy is equality of human being and advocated a human-oriented socialism. With perestroika this Marxist-Leninist concept of socialist democracy has come in a new form - it is renewed once again - as discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation.

The reason, form and course of Hungarian and Czechoslovak reform have been widely discussed in the second and third chapter respectively. In Hungary,

Stalin's death served as an inherent reason and the movement was crystallised immediately after Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation programme. In Czechoslovakia the demand for change was accelerated by Dubcek himself. He was instrumental in the drafting of the Action Programme; the blueprint for reform. Unlike Nagy, Dubcek was comparatively in an advantageous position due to his majority in the Central Committee. The immediate reason for the upsurge was the articles published on the tenth anniversary of Imre Nagy's execution, where he was described as a real hero and a true martyr.

Socialism in East Europe has come a long way from 1945 to the nineties. On its course it has experienced the need for change sometimes from within, sometimes from without, sometimes imposed from above and sometimes from below. Whatever the case may be people have made it clear, Stalinist model of socialism is no alternative of a better living, it needs a major change to make it viable, the developments in Poland and Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 bears ample testimony to the above statement. Such a comparative analysis of the 1956 and 1968 reform movements have been discussed in the fourth chapter.

The fifth and the last chapter deals about the conducive atmosphere created by perestroika for a major systemic change in East Europe. Greatly influenced by this democratic reconstruction programme the East Europeans engaged themselves in reforming their outdated socialism even to the extent of renouncing the Stalinist model in favour of democracy and a more human socialism.

With the emergence Gorbachev and his reform experiments, socialism has perhaps undergone a fundamental transformation from a totalitarian to a democratic one. This totalitarian character of socialism, in the past, had invited reform movements. Gorbachev, for that matter the present socialists, seems to have learnt a lot from the past and with this knowledge of the past they have tried to make socialism more human, workable and at the sametime more dynamic.

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