

Gorbachov lays basis for sweeping personnel shifts

by Konstantin George

The long-delayed Central Committee Plenum of the Soviet Communist Party was held in Moscow on Jan. 27 and 28. It opened with a six-hour address by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov, who repeatedly stressed the urgent priority to “restructure the economy and society,” through the extensive modernization of Soviet industry, by applying the latest in science and technology to industry and agriculture. Unstated, but paramount on the agenda, was that “restructuring” and modernization are the key to augmenting the breadth and depth of the Soviet war economy.

Gorbachov declared that personnel changes were the precondition for solving the “deep-rooted problems” stalling the economy’s performance. After praising the 1986 economic performance as the best in nine years, Gorbachov got to the point: “We see that change for the better is taking place slowly, that the course of reorganization is more difficult and the problems which have accumulated in society are more deep-rooted than we first thought.

“There is still some misunderstanding in society and in the party concerning the complexity of the situation in which the country finds itself. Perhaps this also explains questions from some comrades about the measures that are being taken by the Politburo and the government, in the course of the reorganization. . . . We are often asked if we are not maneuvering too sharp a turn. . . .

“We are talking about a turning point and measures of a revolutionary character. . . . We simply do not have any other choice. We must not retreat and do not have anywhere to retreat to.”

Gorbachov spoke in the present tense of “resistance” to his policies in parts of the Soviet leadership: “Their main concern is to preserve the old, obsolete ways . . . their own privileges, even though this does not accord with our principles . . . or with our present policies.”

With these calls for housecleaning in the speech, one was expecting far-reaching personnel changes. Things did not

quite turn out that way. Gorbachov won very important personnel change victories, embodying great significance for future plenums, but by no means got all he wanted—at least for this round.

The Secretariat as springboard

On the ruling Politburo, the only change was the foreseen removal of 75-year-old Dinmukhamed Kunaev, ousted in December as party boss in Kazakhstan. This leaves 11 full members on the Politburo. Gorbachov did not effect any change in Central Committee membership, either through removal or through promotion of his allies among the candidate CC members to full CC membership.

However, far more crucial for Gorbachov’s ability to effect more sweeping changes at future CC plenums, were the addition of one candidate, or non-voting, Politburo member, and two appointments to the powerful party Secretariat, composed of the Central Committee secretaries, who shape policy in all spheres of Soviet life. Since Gorbachov came to power in March 1985, he has systematically packed the Secretariat, and promoted several protégés to Politburo candidate membership.

The Plenum elected Gorbachov’s close colleague Aleksandr Yakovlev as candidate Politburo member, while retaining his position (since July 1985) as CC secretary in charge of propaganda. Through the Plenum’s decision to “retire for reasons of health,” 72-year-old Mikhail Zimyanin as CC secretary in charge of the Party’s Ideological Commission, Yakovlev now also has been handed Zimyanin’s functions. In one move, Yakovlev, adviser to Gorbachov at both the Geneva and Reykjavik summits, has become at least number three on the Secretariat, following Gorbachov and the Politburo’s number-two man, Yegor Ligachov. Yakovlev now runs propaganda, and has general oversight over ideology, culture, and science.

Added to the Secretariat was Anatoli Lukyanov, a close

friend of Gorbachov's since the early 1950s, when they were both law students at Moscow University. One of Gorbachov's first moves as general secretary was to bring Lukyanov to head the Central Committee's General Department, which is the Politburo's office apparatus, and hence a vital post. Lukyanov as CC secretary will continue to head this all-important post.

The other addition to the Secretariat is the Byelorussian party boss, N. Slyunkov, promoted by Gorbachov to candidate membership on the Politburo at the 27th Party Congress. Slyunkov is an expert on the economy (from 1974 till 1983, when Andropov appointed him boss in Byelorussia, Slyunkov was deputy chairman of the Gosplan, or State Planning Commission), with particular responsibility for the machine-building and machine-tool industries. He will now be taking over at least some of the responsibilities for the economy and military economy held by Lev Zaikov, Politburo member and former Leningrad party boss.

Of the Secretariat's 11 members apart from Gorbachov himself, 10 have been appointed under Gorbachov. The next phase for Gorbachov is to pack the Politburo. Yakovlev and Slyunkov are in place for such a leap, and, a little further down the road—perhaps soon—Lukyanov. All three first became Central Committee members only in 1986.

In his speech, Gorbachov went to great lengths to denounce the Brezhnev era, citing rampant corruption, "the spread of alcoholism and drug abuse," the erosion of "dedication" and "patriotism," and, leadership attitudes and structures which blocked "renewal." Gorbachov speaks a lot about *glasnost* ("openness"). If he were honest, he would admit that in both his general "packing" strategy, and in the promotion of his old buddy Lukyanov, he stole a page out of Brezhnev's book. Brezhnev too, picked a crony out of obscurity, brought him to Moscow to run the CC's General Department, and then promoted him, first to CC Secretary, and finally to the Politburo. The crony's name: Konstantin Chernenko.

Documentation

The following are additional excerpts from Gorbachov's speech, as reported by the Soviet news agency TASS:

“. . . Evidently the time has come to begin elaborating legal acts guaranteeing openness. . . . These should ensure maximum openness and the activities of state and public organizations and give the working people a real opportunity to express their opinions on any aspect of society.”

Gorbachov spoke of "far-reaching democratization" which would lead to a "truly revolutionary and comprehensive

transformation of society." Soviet citizens who do not belong to the party, he said, should be promoted to "leading positions" in non-party government, economic, cultural, and other functions. He said it would be "useful to publish a broad draft for preliminary discussion" of the new law.

Gorbachov put forward the idea of changing "the method of electing party leaders. . . . It is suggested that party secretaries, including first secretaries, be elected by secret vote at plenums of the corresponding party committees. Members of the party committee would have the right to put on the voting ticket any number of candidates. . . . It is essential to rid the voting procedures of formalism. . . .

"Some comrades, apparently, find it hard to understand that democratization is not just a slogan, but the essence of reorganization. . . . They must change their views and habits, so as not to find themselves set aside from the mainstream of life. This is our persistent advice to all who are still doubting and slow. . . . The point at issue is certainly not any break-up of our political system. . . . Socialist democracy has nothing in common with permissiveness, irresponsibility, anarchy. Real democracy serves every person, protecting his political and social rights, and it simultaneously serves every collective and society as a whole."

Referring to the Brezhnev era, Gorbachov spoke of the erosion of "ideological dedication, labor enthusiasm, and Soviet patriotism . . . bringing a surge of skepticism and indifference. . . . That section of the population, young people among them, whose ultimate goal in life was material well-being and gain by any means, grew larger. . . . Their cynical stand acquired more and more aggressive form, poisoning the mentality of those around them and triggering a wave of consumerism. . . . The spread of alcoholism and drug abuse and a rise in crime became indicators of the decline of social mores. . . . Disregard for laws, report-padding, bribe-taking, and the encouragement of toadyism and adulation had a deleterious effect on the moral atmosphere in society."

Gorbachov listed areas where corruption and "criminally organized activities" were rife and "in extremely ugly forms": in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Moldavia, Krasnodar, and Rostov—and "also in Moscow." Also for corruption, he singled out the (pre-1986) foreign trade ministry and the interior ministry.

"Real care for people, for the conditions of their life and work and for social well being were often replaced with political flattery—the mass distribution of awards, titles, and prizes. An atmosphere of permissiveness was taking shape, and rigorousness, discipline, and responsibility were declining."

Gorbachov stressed the need to fight "all manifestations of ethnic extremism, nationalism, chauvinism, Zionism, and anti-Semitism." He spoke of the "seriousness" of the December 1986 Kazakhstan riots, referring to "past failures" to put down "nationalistic sentiments" there.