THE "MYSTERY" OF THE SOVIET COLLAPSE

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As we approach the fifteenth anniversary of the demise of the Soviet Union, its sudden collapse remains mysterious. Every revolution is a surprise, but in the case of the latest Russian Revolution—meaning the one that unfolded after Mikhail Gorbachev consolidated his power at the Twenty-Seventh Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) twenty years ago this past February—the surprise was especially great. At the time, virtually no Western experts, Soviet or foreign officials, or even Soviet reformers foresaw the impending collapse of the system of one-party dictatorship, state ownership of the economy, and the Kremlin's control over its domestic and East European empires. Neither in the early 1980s nor at the time that Gorbachev became CPSU general-secretary in 1985 did any of these contemporaries see the situation as a crisis so urgent, and the "system" as so impervious to reform, that a revolution would be inevitable. While they disagreed about the size and depth of the Soviet system's problems, no one felt them to be life-threatening in the medium term, let alone in the near future.

Whence such strangely universal shortsightedness? The failure of U.S. Sovietologists to anticipate the Soviet collapse may in part be attributed to the "Cold War revisionism" and anti-anticommunism that tended to exaggerate the Soviet regime's stability and legitimacy. Yet others who could hardly be considered "soft on communism" were also left feeling puzzled by its demise. George F. Kennan, an architect of U.S. strategy in the Cold War, confessed that in reviewing the entire "history

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of international affairs in the modern era" he found it "hard to think of any event more strange and startling, and at first glance inexplicable, than the sudden and total disintegration and disappearance . . . of the great power known successively as the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union." Historian Richard Pipes called the revolution "unexpected." The author of *The Soviet Tragedy* Martin Malia thought the "suddenness and completeness" of the Soviet system's collapse to be "the greatest surprise of the end of the twentieth century." Another eminent historian, François Furet, concluded his rather gleeful postmortem of "the idea of communism in the twentieth century" by stating that "the manner in which first the Soviet Union and then its empire fell apart remains mysterious."[1] And when in the spring of 1993 several leading conservative Sovietologists published a collection of essays on the Soviet Union's demise in *The National Interest,* the "special issue" was titled "The Strange Death of Soviet Communism."

Searching for Causes

After being duly noted, this collective lapse in judgment could have been safely consigned to a mental file containing the memories of many other oddities and caprices of the social sciences and then safely forgotten—were it not for the fact that even today, at a twenty-year remove, the foundation of the consensus in what was then known as the "Sovietological community" seems just as solid, resting on the conclusions reached by the standard method of placing available knowledge in the context of the regime's history. Both the knowledge and the historical context bespoke the regime's continuation, or at most its long, drawn-out decline.

In 1985, the Soviet Union possessed much the same set of natural and human resources that it had had ten years before. There had been no devastation from natural disasters or epidemics. Perennial shortages, long lines in stores, food rationing, and acute poverty, especially among elderly and rural folk, were nothing new. Indeed, things had been much worse.

In the past, the USSR had weathered far greater calamities without the Soviet state surrendering one iota of its control over society and the economy. In any case—as the examples of Castro's Cuba, Kim Jong Il's North Korea, Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Mao's China, and Stalin's USSR amply show—in totalitarian regimes the connection between popular deprivation and a change in policies is tenuous at best and often results not in liberalizing reforms but in heavier repression. In the 1980s, the Soviet Union, too, had more than enough resilience to travel the same path. Such certainly appeared to be the thrust of Yuri Andropov's brief reign from 1982 to his death in 1984—a period that elsewhere I have called "a police renaissance."

On the economic front as well, the 1980s may have been lackadaisical but they hardly looked catastrophic. From 1981 through 1989, annual GDP growth lagged behind the rates reached in the 1960s and 1970s, but averaged 1.9 percent from 1981 to 1985, and later in the decade rose as high as 3.5 percent.[2] The budget deficit was less than 2 percent of GDP in 1985, and although it grew to almost 9 percent by 1989, most economists would still gauge that as manageable.[3] Falling oil prices and rising external debt dealt hard blows, but all in all, as leading experts on the late Soviet economy conclude, the financial crisis did not become acute until 1988, and could have been averted as late as the summer of 1990.[4] Inflation-adjusted wages continued to rise, moreover, even though shortages eroded earners' true purchasing power. Stagnation was obvious, but as Peter Rutland has pointed out, "chronic ailments . . . are not necessarily fatal."[5] In Anders Åslund's summary view, the situation of 1985 to 1987 "was not at all dramatic" even if it did raise questions about the Soviet economic system's "long-term viability."[6]

In politics, twenty years of relentless repression had left nearly all prominent dissidents in jail, internal or external exile, or in their graves. Far more menacing to the regime were the sentiments for greater autonomy or outright independence from Moscow being felt in many corners of the USSR, and especially in Georgia, the three Baltic republics, and western Ukraine. Centrifugal pressures were intensifying and were sure to cause fissures eventually. Yet "eventually" can be a long time. Meanwhile, merciless police terror was decimating the "nationalists" with especially long and brutal prison terms that amounted to death sentences.

If the USSR's economic condition and domestic political situation fail to account for the prerevolutionary crisis, are there other causes that can fill the gap? Some that are often cited also fall short. The Soviet Union was hardly crumbling under external pressures. On the contrary, in 1985 it was at the height of its world power and influence, anchored in a state of strategic nuclear parity with the United States. To be sure, Afghanistan increasingly looked like a long war, but for a military numbering five million troops the losses were negligible, and hopes for a victory through sheer attrition and tactics unrestrained by domestic or international public opinion were well founded. Nor was the monetary cost of the war—estimated at US$4 to 5 billion in 1985—particularly crushing.[7]

The "Reagan Doctrine" of resisting and, if possible, reversing the advent of Soviet client regimes in the Third World put considerable and often embarrassing pressure on the empire's perimeter (most notably, in addition to Afghanistan, in Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Nicaragua). Yet there, too, Soviet difficulties were far from lethal and had a reasonable chance of being redressed by inevitable changes in U.S. public opinion and the occupancy of the White House.

As a precursor to a potentially very costly competition, the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) was crucial—but not as a portent of a pending military defeat. Like the vociferous opponents of the program in the West, the Kremlin knew that an effective deployment was decades away at least. The massive costs did seem to matter a great deal—but only *after* the revolution in Russia was well underway and public opinion had begun to matter—and with it, the standard of living that the SDI contest with Washington was likely to beggar.

Finally, the peaceful anticommunist workers' revolution that began in Poland in 1980 had underscored the precariousness of the Soviet empire in Eastern and Central Europe. By 1985, however, the Polish military regime and martial law appeared to have contained the Solidarity rebellion and pushed it to the point of exhaustion. The Soviet Union seemed to have adjusted well to the task of undertaking a ruthless "pacification" in its East European empire every twelve years—Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, Poland in 1980—without much regard for world opinion. Following the West's lead, East Europeans too seemed prepared to tolerate Soviet domination and occupation indefinitely. Even some of the leading dissidents among them aspired only to make their Mitteleuropa a "bridge" between the Soviet-dominated East and the democratic West.

In short, in the words of Adam Ulam, one of the most astute students of the Soviet regime's past and then-present, "We tend to forget that in 1985, no government of a major state appeared to be as firmly in power, its policies as clearly set in their course, as that of the USSR."[8]

The Limits of Structuralist Explanations

Yet if the mysterious or unforeseen character of the Soviet collapse was not, for the most part, a product of negligence, incompetence, or ideological bias on the part of individual Sovietologists, this exoneration brings no relief. On the contrary, we immediately face a far larger difficulty. If none of the traditional avenues and methods of Sovietological inquiry pointed to the prospect that a vast and enormously powerful imperial state was about to fall apart with stunning speed and completeness, the error is likely to be a product of systemic deficiency. In science, such deficiency is usually traceable to a dominant paradigm, meaning the habitual focus of research and analysis, the prevailing methods of inquiry and reasoning, the common "assumptions and imageries," "concepts and propositions," and expected patterns of causality that scientists share and amend incrementally until a scientific revolution brings about an overhaul.[9]

Then as now, the reigning paradigm for anticipating and analyzing large-scale social upheavals—the method that several generations of U.S. social scientists, including experts on the Soviet Union, had come to accept and routinely to deploy—was structuralism. Rooted in Marx's

"historical materialism," structuralism focuses on the development of the "forces of production" (the economic system), which are deemed to be the "basis" of any social and political organization. In its constant development, this basis comes into conflict with the increasingly obsolete and constraining "relations of production" (the "superstructure," or political and social arrangements) within society. There ensues a political revolution driven by those socioeconomic classes whose location in the economic system makes them especially desirous of change. The constraining political, cultural, and social "superstructure" is discarded—and with it the impediment to the economic progress that one day (Marx claims) will bring about a classless communist society.[10]

Modifying and updating the Marxian theory, structuralists reject Marx's philosophy of history, in which class wars and revolutions are stages pointing toward the inevitable triumph of classless communism. Following Max Weber,[11] structuralists emphasize the relative autonomy of state institutions and bureaucracies as political actors—in contrast to Marx's view of them as nothing more than "committees" for carrying out the agenda of the economically dominant class. Thus the character and outcomes of revolutions may differ depending on "institutional variations among the states."[12] The causes of "social revolutions" (or what used to be known as "great revolutions") are traceable to the inability of states to make the necessary economic, social, or political reforms because of unfavorable "macrostructural" domestic or international conditions. The result is a breakdown in state organizations, particularly as regards their administrative, military, and coercive capabilities.

This is not the occasion to review the immense literature of structuralism in any detail. Of relevance to us here is that, with all the updates and modifications, the thrust of the analysis is still unmistakably that of historical materialism. (As Vladimir Nabokov used say in his Cornell lectures on *Ulysses:* "Joyce lost his religion but kept his categories."[13]) That is, the "meta-factors" of structuralist analysis[14]—whether economic, political, institutional, or demographic—continue to be "material" and "objective," independent of (or "exogenous" to) people and people's ideas. In the words of Theda Skocpol, perhaps the leading structuralist theoretician active today, "revolutions are not made; they come"; it is "objective relations and conflicts" among "groups and nations" that explain revolutions, not "interests, outlooks, or ideologies."[15]

To be sure, as Skocpol has so brilliantly demonstrated in her groundbreaking study of great revolutions past, structuralist explanations can be very helpful in identifying long-term tectonic shifts in economies, institutions, politics, demography, or international circumstances as factors in the genesis and course of revolutions. Yet nothing in history is automatic or inevitable. The fact that something happened—and, in retrospect, there were very good reasons for its having happened—means neither that it had to happen nor that it could have happened only in the

way that it did. To use the distinction that Charles Tilly frequently makes, a "revolutionary situation" is different from a "revolutionary outcome," and only a tiny fraction of the former evolve into the latter.[16]

If an unfolding revolution is represented by a continuum from A to D, structuralist explanations may be very helpful in explaining the progression from an obvious crisis to a revolution (that is, from C to D), and even from B to C. But they are clearly deficient in illuminating what happens between A and B or, among other matters, in explaining why structures that had been present in *ancien régimes* for decades before the first stirring of a crisis suddenly became risk-enhancers. The latest Russian Revolution is no exception: There were plenty of structural reasons *why* the Soviet Union should have collapsed as it did. Yet the structural approach fails to provide a satisfying account of *how* it happened.

In the absence of any sharp worsening in "structural" conditions, how did a powerful state and a vast economy—ridden as they were with large and visible problems, yet appearing viable, legitimate, and lasting to the great majority of citizens and leaders as well as to outside experts—suddenly come between 1987 and 1991 to seem unworkable and (worse yet) shameful, illegitimate, and intolerable in the eyes of a politically active minority of the sort that everywhere and at all times makes revolutions?

A plausible reason for the inability of the structuralist approach to provide a satisfactory account of this chain of events stems from what its proponents proudly label an "impersonal and non-subjective," "nonintentionalist and nonvoluntarist" focus[17]—in contrast to "voluntarist," "purposive," "intentionalist," or even "moralistic" ways of explaining revolutions. "Are revolutions really *made* by ideological movements, consisting of elites and masses committed to alternative societal values?" Skocpol asks. And she answers: "In no sense did . . . vanguards with large, ideologically imbued mass followings, ever create the essentially politico-military revolutionary crisis they exploited."[18]

The Moral Imperative

Yet it was precisely such "intentionalism"—that is, individuals inspired by ideas, which they impart to others—that was clearly central to the inception and course of the most recent Russian Revolution. As leading Soviet sociologist Tatiana Zaslavskaya told an interviewer last year: "If Gorbachev had not come to head the Politburo in 1985, that half-existence, half-life we had in Russia would continue still for several decades."[19]

Of course, much like Western historians and political scientists, the Gorbachev cohort had been brought up in the Marxist tradition (albeit in a much cruder, Stalinesque version) and lacked conceptual categories (and, one suspects, often even a vocabulary) to give coherence to their "nonmaterial" concerns. Yet while economic betterment was their

banner, there is little doubt that Gorbachev and his supporters first set out to right political and moral, not just economic, wrongs. In the words of Vladimir Mau, one of the finest Russian economic historians of the latest Russian Revolution:

> Gorbachev's attempts at reforming the Soviet system were not rooted in the realization that an economic or a systemic crisis had begun. . . . The crisis did not influence everyday life; it did not impinge on the mood of the elite or the public and it was not a decisive factor in economic decision-making.[20]

Indeed, on closer inspection the concerns about economic problems often seem no more than a foil for anguish over spiritual decline, the corrosive effects of the Stalinist past, and a desperate search for answers to the grand questions with which every great revolution starts: What is a good, dignified life? What constitutes a just social and economic order? What is a decent and legitimate state? What should be such a state's relationship to civil society?

When Gorbachev later recalled how in 1985 he felt that "we couldn't go on like that any longer, and we had to change life radically, break away from the past malpractices," he called this his "*moral* position."[21] The same "position" is evident in the memoirs of Gorbachev's first prime minister, Nikolai Ryzhkov, for whom the "moral *[nravstennoe]* state of the [Soviet] society" in 1985 was its "most terrifying" feature:

> [By 1985] the stuffiness in the country has reached the maximum: after that only death. Nothing was done with any care. . . . [We] stole from ourselves, took and gave bribes, lied in reports, in newspapers, from high podiums, wallowed in our lies, hung medals on one another. And all of this, from top to bottom and from bottom to top.[22]

Unlike Khrushchev, who knew firsthand how precariously poised was the house that Stalin had built on terror and lies, the Gorbachev group appeared to believe that what was morally right was also politically manageable. There is hardly a better example of the primacy of the moral component in Gorbachev's opening crusade than the campaign against alcohol consumption, undertaken and sustained in the face of obviously and extremely adverse political and economic consequences. In 1985, the state's annual income from the sale of alcoholic beverages constituted between 12 and 14 percent of total budget revenues.[23] (In 1990, Gorbachev disclosed that, alongside oil exports, the vodka trade sustained the Soviet Union between 1970 and 1985.[24]) Between 1985 and 1988, the anti-alcohol campaign cost the Soviet Treasury 67 billion rubles—the equivalent of almost 9 percent of the 1985 GNP, 17 percent of that year's revenue, and nearly four times the sum spent on health care.[25] Yet when Ryzhkov objected to the campaign's excesses he was overruled by other members of the Gorbachev "team" because, as they

put it, he was "concerned about the economy instead of morality" and the "morals of the nation must be rescued by any means available."[26]

The closest approximation to a well-integrated vision of *perestroika* as a revolution of ideas and ideals—a normative, conceptual, even cognitive overhaul—is to be found in articles, interviews, and memoirs by the "godfather of *glasnost,*" Aleksandr Yakovlev, who died in Moscow last October, six weeks shy of his eighty-second birthday. When he returned to the Soviet Union in 1983 after a ten-year stint as Moscow's ambassador to Canada, Yakovlev's memory of what he saw was much the same as Gorbachev's and Ryzhkov's:

> [T]he moment was at hand when people would say, "Enough! We cannot live like this any longer. Everything must be done in a new way. We must reconsider our concepts, our approaches, our views of the past and of our future." There had come an understanding that it was simply impossible to live as we lived before—intolerably, humiliatingly.[27]

Yakovlev makes clear that, for both himself and Gorbachev, democratization was the most urgent imperative, that it came far ahead of any economic objectives in the initial impulse for *perestroika.* In his remarkable final book *Sumerki* (Twilight), published in Moscow in 2003, Yakovlev refers to the upheaval a few times as the "March–April [1985] Revolution," but far more frequently calls what happened a "Reformation" to underscore the moral and spiritual transformation. For him, *perestroika* was an "attempt to . . . end the amorality of the regime."[28]

In a secret memorandum that Yakovlev handed to Gorbachev in December 1985, a few months after Gorbachev had made him a secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Yakovlev argued, "The main issue today is not only the economy. This is only the material side of the process. The heart of the matter lies in the political system, that is, its relation to man."[29] Hence, the "main principles of *perestroika*": democracy first and foremost, understood as freedom to choose in multicandidate elections; *glasnost,* or freedom of speech and the press; judicial independence; and laws safeguarding key human rights—the inviolability of individual persons, property, and communications; freedom to travel, assemble, and demonstrate; freedom of religion; and the ability of a citizen to sue any official or official body in court. For Yakovlev, *glasnost* was the touchstone of *perestroika.* Soviet society was tormented by lies—"ubiquitous and all-consuming lies." Without *glasnost,* he repeated to newspaper and magazine editors, *perestroika* would be "doomed."

Yakovlev's Contribution

Yakovlev set about implementing his agenda in earnest during the summer of 1986, after he had become head of the Central Committee's Propaganda Department and hence boss of all mass media (including

film), as well as theater, book publishing, and religion. At first, his campaign looked at best like guerrilla warfare: lightning strikes on the nodal points of official Soviet mythology, followed by swift withdrawals into the safety of banalities and denials. After all, Yakovlev explained to what he later called the "orthodox majority in the Politburo," he was only helping to clean what Gorbachev liked to call "alluvia" *[nanosy]* off the healthy body of the Soviet socialism.

Yakovlev replaced the Stalinist editor of the popular weekly magazine *Ogonyok* with Vitaly Korotich—and *Ogonyok* was transformed from one of the USSR's most reactionary publications into a trailblazer of *glasnost*. Yakovlev kept the censors away from Anatoly Rybakov's novel *Children of the Arbat* and thereby opened the floodgates to a flow of first-rate anti-Stalinist fiction that would help *perestroika* at least as much as did liberal newspapers and magazines.

Yakovlev reviewed and approved for release at least two dozen movies that had in some cases been banned for as long as twenty years. Acting at the suggestion of the USSR's Georgian-born foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, Yakovlev viewed and then pushed through approval for Georgian director Tengiz Abuladze's *Pokayanie* (Repentance), the film with which g*lasnost* in the arts began. Yakovlev admired the movie for "smashing, like a sledgehammer, the system of lies, hypocrisy, and violence." He deceived the Politburo by promising a very limited release while in fact secretly ordering the printing and screening of many copies. Finally, Yakovlev's time "in charge of ideology" also saw more than 400,000 churches, mosques, synagogues, and other houses of prayer returned to believers.

Yakovlev's agenda soon began to diverge from Gorbachev's. When they first met and instantly took to each other in 1983, both had wanted the same things—a humane, "democratic," one-party socialism with a mixed economy combining a certain amount of private enterprise with a dominant state presence. For Gorbachev, the prototype of such "socialism with a human face" was a mythologized version of the Soviet Union during the period of the New Economic Policy that Lenin began in 1921 and Stalin ended in 1929.

Gorbachev hardly changed. Until his resignation in December 1991, he firmly believed in the "socialist choice" of the Russian people and was given to quoting Lenin. Yakovlev, in his quest for the truth, completely discarded Leninism as another totalitarian movement, advocated a multiparty system, and linked private property and liberty. "A marketless socialism is a utopia—and a bloody one at that," he wrote. "A free society is impossible without a property owner. . . . The alienation of man from property . . . is the DNA of our [system's] vices."

As a practical matter, however, what made Yakovlev's work possible was the central element in Gorbachev's *modus operandi*—an almost physical aversion to violence, political repression, and coercion. None

of these had any place in Gorbachev's version of socialism "with a human face," which he pursued devotedly and stubbornly to the very end. A witness recalls Gorbachev saying in the late 1980s:

> "We are told that we should pound our fists on the table," and the general secretary clenched his hand in a fist to "show how it is done." "Generally speaking," continued Gorbachev, "it could be done. But one does not feel like it."[30]

Gradually, there emerged a division of labor between Yakovlev and Gorbachev that would prove fatal to the regime by sustaining the revolution-from-above until, by the end of 1989, it had become a revolution-from-below. Gorbachev guarded the outer perimeter, as it were, beating back increasingly insistent demands from the *nomenklatura* that he should apply the brakes or even reverse course, by means of wide-scale repression if necessary.

Within the coercion-free space created by this refusal, Yakovlev defended the budding freedoms of speech and press against almost daily attacks in the Politburo while simultaneously cajoling the frightened intelligentsia into daring to write and publish the truth. The only collateral that Yakovlev could offer against the risk of reversals and retributions was his words and, beginning in 1987, his Politburo membership. "Write about everything but do not lie!" Yakovlev told the editors of liberal newspapers and magazines. "*Glasnost* is the heart of democracy, not a gift from those in power. Do not run to me asking what to publish and what not to publish. Take responsibility!"

In the process, he found himself required, as he later put it, to "play the fool." He repeated ad nauseam to the Politburo and the Secretariat that *glasnost* could only "strengthen socialism" while knowing that openness would spell "the end of Stalinism and one-party rule." He watched with satisfaction and perhaps with glee the manner in which the first "carefully measured doses of *glasnost* corroded the dogmas of the repressive system."

In one of his more dramatic gestures—and one that caused him huge headaches in the Politburo—Yakovlev allowed his name to be added to the "council of founders" listed on the masthead of the newspaper *Moskovskie novost,* the flagship of *glasnost,* whose editor Yegor Yakovlev (no relation) he had handpicked. This placed the senior Yakovlev squarely between the newspaper and the Politburo conservatives led by Yegor Ligachev. When Ligachev connived with *Sovietskiaya Rossiya* to launch the first open challenge to the reforms with an April 1988 anti-*perestroika* manifesto, it was Yakovlev who wrote the response in *Pravda* and put *glasnost* back on track.

Yet amid the neverending workdays, the constant tension, and the precariousness of the entire enterprise, the rewards were huge and hugely satisfying. "The life-giving liquids of *glasnost* and freedom of speech

slaked the enslaved society's thirst for truth," Yakovlev wrote. Like everyone else, at times he felt "intoxicated" by the "first gulps of freedom: the ability to speak freely, to think freely without the fear of denunciations or the camps." Before they began to lose one another to fatigue, ambition, and betrayals, the small team that "dared to undertake the Reformation" was united, respectful of its members, and, most of all, "inspired . . . by a great goal."

Yakovlev was convinced that renewal would be impossible without cleansing, that cleansing could not be accomplished without a national repentance, and that repentance could never occur without a full knowledge of the horrors that the Soviet regime had perpetrated. He chaired the President's Commission on Additional Research into Materials Connected to Repressions, and rehabilitated hundreds of thousands of men and women whom Stalin had killed or imprisoned. "This is a moral issue," Yakovlev told a *Pravda* interviewer in June 1990. "Without confronting it, burdened with this back-breaking legacy, we will not be able to move forward."[31]

In May 1989, Yakovlev was elected chairman of another commission, empaneled by the first semidemocratically elected parliament, the Congress of People's Deputies (CPD). The task of this commission was to examine the "legal and political foundation" of the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact of August 1939, especially the secret "protocols" that called for the division of Poland and gave the USSR a free hand to seize Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In a speech that persuaded the CPD to repudiate the Pact (which the CPD had refused to denounce just a few months earlier), Yakovlev said:

> The theory of relativity, comrades, is a great step in the understanding of the universe. But there can be no relativity in morality. . . . We have to understand that lawlessness is horrifying not only in its direct effects but also because it creates situations when amorality and opportunism start to be considered the norm. Thus, any evaluation we make [of the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact], comrade deputies, will be not only political, but moral as well.[32]

Repentance and Regression

Some of Yakovlev's best writing stems from the work of uncovering the crimes of the Soviet regime. Included in this literary corpus are many of the finest texts of *glasnost*—texts which, as only works associated with great revolutions tend to do, established a "gold standard" of quality in Russian political prose that had not been seen for almost a century and which will not likely be seen again any time soon. Within this *oeuvre,* by far the most remarkable document is a ten-minute speech, titled "Acts of Justice and Repentance," that Yakovlev read on Soviet state television on 20 August 1990.

The occasion was to announce Gorbachev's signing of two decrees. One restored the rights of victims of repression from the 1920s to the 1950s, while the other invalidated the laws that deprived dissidents of citizenship. It is hard to think of another instance in Russian history when a top political leader publicly uttered words of such piercing bitterness, acknowledged so huge a guilt, and begged for repentance and forgiveness with such force and sincerity:

> When we say that we are "rehabilitating" someone—as if benevolently forgiving them for some transgressions of the past—it is hypocrisy. It is not them that we are forgiving. It is ourselves. It is we who are to blame that for years they were slandered and oppressed. So we are "rehabilitating" ourselves—not those who thought differently, who had different convictions. They wanted only what was good for us and they wanted freedom for us, but the [Soviet] leadership responded with the evil of prisons and the camps. . . .
>
> History had not known such a concentrated hatred toward human beings. . . . God save me from calling for revenge, for a new vicious circle of violence. But our people must know the names and the deeds [of the perpetrators] in order to judge them by moral criteria, which our society, having gone through everything imaginable and unimaginable, needs so much.[33]

It is hardly surprising then—but still painful—to learn of the deep disappointment that Vladmir Putin's advent brought Yakovlev. In an article published in April 2005, five months before his death, he bemoaned Putin's unveiling of a bas-relief memorial to Andropov; the new Russian anthem set to the music of the old Stalinist hymn; the gradual return of the "dictatorship of the state functionaries"; and above all, the curtailment of the freedoms of speech and the press that Yakovlev considered the Revolution's main achievements.[34]

Still, he remained the same optimist that he had been at the end of 1990 when it seemed that the Revolution would be extinguished any day by cold, hunger, and a military coup. "We have something that is irreversible," Yakovlev had written then:

> It lies in the impalpable yet real sphere of the spirit. Society will never be the same, for there has been a qualitative breakthrough in consciousness. Irreversible is the deliverance from the myths, stereotypes, self-deception, and self-satisfaction that have poisoned our brains and our feelings for decades. Irreversible is the realization that a life shaped by conformism leads only to the quagmire of lagging behind in history. Irreversible is the gradual return of common human ideals and values, the realization of their moral imperative: freedom for the individual conscience; decency; kindness; charity. Irreversible is the awakening of the thirst for active life, for the freedom of exploration.[35]

As for his own role, he closes his final book by reflecting that "the most important thing is not the doubts, the slights or the frustration. It is the fact that in our great labor of freedom we, the participants in the March–April Revolution, tried to advance, halting and stumbling, toward liberty, not wondering if it would bring us glory or condemnation."[36]

NOTES

1. Kennan is quoted in Paul Hollander, *Personal Will and Political Belief* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 1. Pipes's quote appears as a back-cover endorsement on the same book. See also Martin Malia, "A Fatal Logic," *The National Interest* (Spring 1993): 80; and François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 500–501.

2. Irina Starodubrovskaya and Vladimir Mau, *Velikie revolutsii on Kromvelya do Putina* (Great revolutions from Cromwell to Putin) (Moscow: Vagrius, 2004), 109.

3. Yegor Gaidar, *Dologoe vremya* (Moscow: Delo, 2005), Table 8.30; Irina Starodubrovskaya and Vladimir Mau, *Velikie revolutsii,* Table 8.5; and Anders Åslund, *How Russia Became a Market Economy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1995), Table 2-5.

4. Yegor Gaidar, *Dologoe vremya,* 339; Anders Åslund, *How Russia Became a Market Economy,* 48.

5. Peter Rutland, "Sovietology: Notes for a Post-Mortem," *The National Interest* (Spring 1993): 121.

6. Anders Åslund, *How Russia Became a Market Economy,* 47, 50–51.

7. Anders Åslund, "How Small Is Soviet National Income?" in Henry S. Rowen and Charles Wolf, eds., *The Impoverished Superpower* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1990), 37.

8. As quoted in Paul Hollander, *Political Will and Personal Belief* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 87.

9. Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social* Structure (New York: Free Press, 1968), 13, 69; Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1962).

10. Karl Marx, "Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*" and "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 4–5, 474–77.

11. See, for example, H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 47.

12. Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 11; and Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), 5.

13. Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1980), 286.

14. I use the term "structuralist" rather than "structural" deliberately in order to

underscore the reductionism of the former. Structuralism, of course, is an indispensable analytical method that seeks explanations for social phenomena in the relatively permanent realities and patterns of interaction that are generally unaffected by variations among individual components. Cultural structures in a particular society, for example, can include status, roles, norms, and expectations as well as goals, purposes, and interests plus the acceptable modes of reaching for such goals. See, for instance, Lewis A. Coser, ed., *Masters of Sociological Thought* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 181; and Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 186–87. Structural analysis may very profitably include ideas and other "metaphysical" factors. See William H. Sewell, Jr., "Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case," in Theda Skocpol, ed., *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 169–98.

15. As quoted in Eric Selbin, "Agency and Culture in Revolutions," in Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies* (Belmont, Calif.: Thomson, 2003), 77.

16. Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions,* 14, 17, 49, 184, 234–35, 239–41.

17. Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (1994), 9, 112,199.

18. Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (1994), 9, 100–107 passim.

19. Tatiana I. Zaslavskaya, "The Correlation Between Healthy and Ill Forces Is Not in Our Favor," interview with Fredo Arias-King, *Demokratizatsiya* 13 (Spring 2005): 297.

20. Vladimir Mau, "Economic Reforms and Revolution," in Yegor Gaidar, ed., *The Economics of Transition* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 36.

21. Interview with Mikhail Gorbachev, ITAR-TASS news agency (Moscow), 13 October 1992.

22. Nikolai Ryzhkov, *Perestroika: Istoriya predatel'stv* (Perestroika: The history of betrayals), (Moscow: Novosti, 1992), 33, 94.

23. Vladmir Treml, "Gorbachev's Anti-Drinking Campaign: A Noble Experiment or a Costly Exercise in Futility," *RL Supplement* (RL 2/87), 18 March 1987, 6.

24. Mikhail Gorbachev, "Krepit' klyuchevoe zveno ekonimiki" (To strengthen the key link of the economy), *Pravda* (Moscow), 10 December 1990.

25. Nikolai Ryzhkov, *Perestroika,* 243. The GNP figure is from Anders Åslund, "How Small Is Soviet National Income?" in Henry S. Rowen and Charles Wolf, Jr., *The Impoverished Superpower* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1990), 37. The figures for the Soviet budget come from Judy Shelton, *The Coming Soviet Crash* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 9; and for health care from Vladimir Treml, "Gorbachev's Anti-Drinking Campaign," 12.

26. Nikolai Ryzhkov, *Perestroika,* 95.

27. Aleksandr Yakovlev, *Muki prochteniya bytiya* (The torments of reading life) (Moscow: Novosti, 1991), 31, 7–8.

28. Aleksandr Yakovlev, "Reformatsiya v Rossii" (Reformation in Russia), *Obshshestvennye nauki i sovremennost',* 30 April 2005, 5.

29. This material from Yakovlev, like that found in the succeeding several

paragraphs, comes from *Sumerki,* 380, 382, 464, 389, 404, 394, 378–79, 390, 476, 373, and 471.

30. Marietta Chudakova, "Itogi and perspektivy sovremennoy rossiyskoy revolutsii: Krugliy stol uchyonykh" (Results and prospects of the modern Russian revolution: A roundtable discussion by scholars), *Obshestvennye nauki i sovremennost',* No. 2 (2002): 24.

31. Aleksandr Yakovlev, *Muki prochteniya bytiya,* 190.

32. "Dossier," *Moskovskie Novosti,* 21–27 October 2005, 6.

33. Aleksandr Yakovlev, *Muki prochteniya bytiya,* 260–61.

34. Aleksandr Yakovlev, "Reformatsiya v Rossii," 5–15.

35. Aleksandr Yakovlev, *Muki prochteniya bytiya,* 7–8.

36. Aleksandr Yakovlev, *Sumerki,* 520.