

decision making and to permit effective adaptation of party policies to rapidly changing circumstances. Since the Bolshevik Revolution, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU has consisted of the highest party and government officials in the Soviet Union. Despite the importance of this body, only a small amount of space was devoted to it in the *Party Rules*, which noted only that the Central Committee chose the Politburo for "leadership of the work of the party between plenums of the Central Committee." The Politburo formed the highest decision-making body in the Soviet Union. Its full and candidate members served on the Politburo by virtue of their party or government positions.

The Politburo was a standing subcommittee of the Central Committee. Like the Central Committee, the Politburo was composed of full and candidate (nonvoting) members. The *Party Rules* neither specified the size of the Politburo nor mentioned candidate status.

Four general career patterns determined accession to membership in the Politburo. Officials of the central party apparatus could rise within that hierarchy to acquire a position that led to a seat on the Secretariat. In 1989 several secretaries of the Central Committee sat on the Politburo. Other officials, such as Mikhail A. Suslov (the party's leading ideologist under Brezhnev) and Aleksandr N. Iakovlev, who also made his career in ideology, attained membership in the Politburo because of their expertise. The technical or economic specialist was a third pattern. For example, Nikolai Sliun'kov probably was brought into the Politburo because of his expertise in economic administration. Finally, a successful career in the provinces often led to a call to Moscow and a career in the central apparatus. Volodymyr Shcherbyts'kyy exemplified this career pattern.

Several interlocking trends have characterized the Politburo since Stalin's death in 1953. Membership in the Politburo has become increasingly representative of important functional and territorial interests. Before 1953 the party leadership concentrated on building the economic, social, and political bases for a socialist society. In the post-Stalin period the leadership has sought instead to manage society and contain social change. Management of society required a division of labor within the Politburo and the admission of people with specialized expertise. Stalin kept the lines of responsibility ambiguous, and he tightly controlled the kinds of information his comrades on the Politburo received. Since 1953 Politburo members have had greater access to information and hence more opportunity to develop consistent policy positions. Because the party leadership eliminated violence as an instrument of elite politics and restrained the secret police after Stalin's death, Politburo members

began advancing policy positions without fear of losing their seats on this body, or even their lives, if they found themselves on the wrong side of the policy debate.

## **Secretariat**

Until September 1988, the Secretariat headed the CPSU's central apparatus and was solely responsible for the development and implementation of party policies. The Secretariat also carried political weight because many of its members sat on the Politburo (see fig. 13). In 1989 eight members of the Secretariat, including the general secretary of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the CPSU, served as full members of the Politburo. One member, Georgii P. Razumovskii, was a candidate member of the Politburo. Those officials who sat on the Politburo, served in the Secretariat, and chaired a party commission were the most powerful in the Soviet Union.

After the formation of the party commissions in the fall of 1988, lines of authority over the central party bureaucracy became very unclear because the responsibilities of the secretaries and the responsibilities of the commissions considerably overlapped. Of the nine secretaries, excluding the general secretary, six chaired party commissions. One Western observer, Alexander Rahr, believed that this factor limited the power of the Secretariat because the influence of the secretaries who chaired the commissions was restricted to specific areas of competence as defined by their commission chairmanships. In addition, the secretaries became answerable to the commissions they chaired. Finally, in one case, a secretary served as a subordinate to another secretary in the latter's role as the chairman of a commission. Viktor P. Nikonov, a secretary responsible for agriculture, was deputy chairman of the Agrarian Policy Commission, which was chaired by Egor K. Ligachev, another party secretary.

Western specialists poorly understood lines of authority in the Secretariat. It was clear that the members of the Secretariat supervised the work of the Central Committee departments. Department chiefs, who normally sat on the Central Committee, were subordinate to the secretaries. For example, in 1989 Aleksandr S. Kapto, the chairman of the Ideological Department, answered to Vadim A. Medvedev, party secretary for ideology, and Valentin A. Falin, the head of the International Department, answered to Iakovlev, party secretary for international policy. Most department heads were assisted by a first deputy head (a first deputy administrator in the case of the Administration of Affairs Department) and from one to six deputy heads (deputy administrators in the case

of the Administration of Affairs Department). However, the International Department had two deputy heads.

In 1989 a variety of departments made up the CPSU's central apparatus. Some departments were worthy of note. The Party Building and Cadre Work Department assigned party personnel in the *nomenklatura* system (see *Nomenklatura*, this ch.). The State and Legal Department supervised the armed forces, the Committee for State Security (Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti—KGB), the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the trade unions, and the Procuracy.

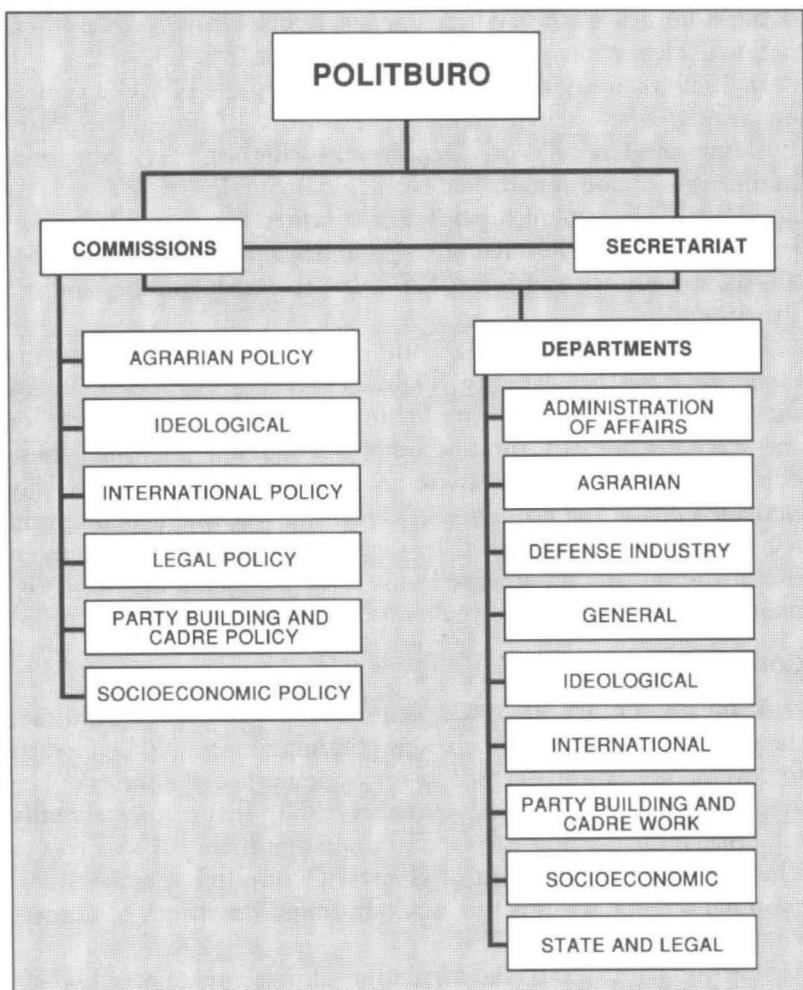
Before 1989 the apparatus contained many more departments responsible for the economy. These departments included one for the economy as a whole, one for machine building, and one for the chemical industry, among others. The party abolished these departments in an effort to remove itself from the day-to-day management of the economy in favor of government bodies and a greater role for the market. In early 1989, Gorbachev suggested that the agrarian and defense industry departments might be disbanded as well as part of his ongoing reform efforts.

### **Commissions**

At the September 30, 1988, plenum of the Central Committee, the CPSU announced that six new commissions would be formed to develop policy and oversee its implementation in a series of key areas. A resolution of the November 1988 plenum that actually established the commissions maintained that their purpose was to "facilitate the involvement of Central Committee members and candidate members in active work on major directions of domestic and foreign policy."

Several factors led to the formation of these new party bodies. First, Gorbachev probably sought to strengthen reformist influence at the top of the party hierarchy. Second, the move was designed to reduce the party's day-to-day involvement in the economy. Thus, only one of the six commissions was concerned with economic policy, while another dealt with agriculture. Finally, Gorbachev's desire to reduce the power of his conservative rival, Ligachev, also helped to explain the move. Prior to September 1988, Ligachev had been the party's second secretary, the official who usually chaired meetings of the Secretariat. By limiting the influence of the Secretariat and by placing Ligachev in charge of agriculture—the Achilles heel of the economy—Gorbachev eliminated Ligachev as a competitor for power.

As of May 1989, the actual work of the commissions belied the significance the party attached to them. In their first six months,



*Figure 13. Central Apparatus of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1988*

none of the commissions had met more than once. All the communiqués reporting on their meetings have been devoid of substance.

#### **General Secretary: Power and Authority**

That certain policies throughout Soviet history have been so clearly identified with the general secretary of the CPSU demonstrated the importance of that position as well as of the stakes in

the succession struggle upon a general secretary's death or removal from office. As general secretary, Stalin determined the party's policies in the economy and foreign affairs and thus gave his name to a whole era in Soviet history. Khrushchev put his stamp on a variety of policies, including peaceful coexistence with the West and the virgin land campaign (see Khrushchev's Reforms and Fall, ch. 2). Soviet and Western observers identified Brezhnev with détente and the Soviet military buildup (see The Brezhnev Era, ch. 2). In the late 1980s, Gorbachev associated his name with the policies of openness, restructuring, and democratization.

The general secretary possessed many powers. As chairman of the Politburo, the general secretary decided the agenda and timing of its deliberations. The general secretary acted as chief executive of the party apparatus and thus supervised the *nomenklatura*. The general secretary also chaired the Defense Council, which managed the Soviet military-industrial complex (see Defense Council, ch. 18). Finally, through attendance at summit meetings with world heads of state, the general secretary acquired symbolic legitimation as the Soviet Union's top ruler.

Once selected for this position by other members of the Politburo and confirmed by the Central Committee, the general secretary had to proceed to build a base of power and strengthen his authority. Officials considered eligible for the position of general secretary held a great amount of power to begin with; they always occupied seats on the Politburo and Secretariat, and they developed a large number of clients throughout the party and government bureaucracies. The general secretary's efforts to extend this power base involved placing loyal clients in strategic positions throughout party and government hierarchies. One measure of the success of the general secretary's efforts in this regard was turnover in the Central Committee at the first party congress following the secretary's accession to the position (see Central Committee, this ch.). The general secretary used these clients to promote desired policies at all levels of the party and government bureaucracies and to ensure accurate transmission of information about policy problems up the hierarchy (see Nomenklatura, this ch.).

To secure his rule and advance his policies, the general secretary also had to increase his authority. American Sovietologist George Breslauer has written that efforts to build authority involved legitimization of the general secretary's policies and programs and demonstration of his competence or indispensability as a leader. The general secretary strove to show that his policies derived from Lenin's teachings and that these policies have led to successes in socialist construction. Moreover, the general secretary strove to

demonstrate a unique insight into the teachings of Marx and Lenin and into the current stage of world development. The general secretary also emphasized personal ties to the people and a leadership motivated by the interests of the workers and peasants (see Party Legitimacy, this ch.). One further means to strengthen the legitimacy of the general secretary's power has been the acquisition of high government offices. Thus in October 1988, Gorbachev became chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, which was the titular head of the Soviet state. He retained his position as head of state when in May 1989 the newly elected Congress of People's Deputies chose a new Supreme Soviet and elected Gorbachev to the just created position of chairman of the Supreme Soviet. In the past, the head of the Soviet state sometimes had been referred to as "president" in Soviet and Western media, although such a position was not identified in the Constitution.

Another means that Soviet general secretaries have used to ensure their authority is the cult of the leader. The cult of the leader has several intended audiences. For example, the general secretary used the cult of the leader to intimidate actual or potential rivals and thus force them to accept and follow his policies. In addition, the cult of the leader reassured those members of the party and government hierarchies whose careers depended upon the success of the general secretary's policies. The cult of the leader provided inspiration to those who wished to identify with a patriarchal figure.

Breslauer has written that Soviet general secretaries since Stalin have attempted to build their authority by creating a sense of national élan. For example, Iurii V. Andropov, general secretary from November 1982 to February 1984, sought to rouse Soviet society with his campaign against alcoholism and corruption. The general secretary has also sought to play the role of problem solver. For example, in the mid- and late 1980s, Gorbachev sought to reverse a decline in economic efficiency by promoting economic policies designed to curb the ministries' role in Soviet economic life and thereby encourage enterprise initiative (see Reforming the Planning System, ch. 11).

Since the death of Lenin, the party elite has been unable to institute regulations governing the transfer of office from one general secretary to the next. The Nineteenth Party Conference called for limiting party officeholders to two five-year terms. However, it was unclear whether this proviso would apply to the general secretary and other top leaders. The party leadership has yet to devise procedures by which the general secretary may relinquish the office. The powers of the office were not set; neither were its rights and

duties. These factors combined to generate a high degree of unpredictability in selecting a new leader and a period of uncertainty while the new general secretary consolidates power.

Three stages have characterized the efforts of various general secretaries to consolidate their power and authority. The first stage begins while the incumbent leader is in power and lasts through his death or ouster. Potential successors seek to place themselves in more powerful positions relative to their rivals. For example, under Konstantin U. Chernenko (general secretary from February 1984 to March 1985) Gorbachev chaired Politburo meetings in the general secretary's absence and also assumed responsibilities for cadre policy. These responsibilities enabled Gorbachev to set the agenda for Politburo meetings and to place persons loyal to him in important positions throughout the regime. Gorbachev's unsuccessful rivals for power, Grigorii V. Romanov and Viktor V. Grishin, had fewer such opportunities to influence the outcome of the struggle to succeed Chernenko.

The second stage occurs with the transfer of authority to the new leader and both the accumulation of positions and the authority that goes with them. This stage can occur over a prolonged period of time and coincide with the next stage. For example, only in 1977 did Brezhnev, named general secretary in 1964, become chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and thus de facto head of state. The third stage involves two steps: consolidation of the new leader's power through the removal of his predecessor's clients and those of his actual and potential rivals for power; and the installation of the new leader's clients in key positions. This stage probably lasts for the duration of the general secretary's tenure.

A succession struggle entails opportunities and problems for the new party leader and for the Soviet leadership as a whole. Transfer of office from one general secretary to another can improve the possibilities for change. Seweryn Bialer has written that "ambition, power, and the desire for innovation all meet in a succession struggle and so prepare the ground for change." Succession disrupts the normal pattern of business. Also, policy initiatives are a critical means of consolidating a new leader's position. Khrushchev's condemnation of Stalin represented an appeal to party officials dissatisfied with Stalinism and an effort to define and control a new program that would better meet the needs of the party and society. Similarly, in the late 1980s Gorbachev's initiatives appealed to officials and citizens who were dissatisfied with the inertia of the late Brezhnev period and who sought to modernize the Soviet economy.

Yet, a succession struggle can also occasion serious difficulties for the leadership. A succession struggle increases the probability for personal and policy conflicts. In turn, these conflicts can lead to political passivity as the rivals for power turn their attention to that struggle rather than to policy development and execution. When the general secretary lacks the influence necessary to promote desired policies, a sense of inertia can debilitate the political system at the intermediate and lower levels. This factor partially explains the resistance that Khrushchev and, in the late 1980s, Gorbachev met in their respective efforts to alter the policies of their predecessors.

## **Intermediate-Level Party Organizations**

The intermediate-level party structure embraced the republic, oblast, *raion* (see Glossary), and city levels of the hierarchy. The organizational scheme of each of these levels resembled the others. In addition, at each of these levels the party organization corresponded to a similar layer in the government administration. According to the *Party Rules*, the authoritative body at each of these levels was the congress (republic level) or conference. These bodies elected a committee that, in turn, chose a bureau with several members (including a first secretary) and a secretariat. Conferences at one level elected delegates to the conference or congress at the next highest level. Thus, the rural or city conference designated delegates to the oblast conference or, in the case of the smaller republics, directly to the republic party congress. The oblast conference elected delegates to congresses of the larger republics. In May 1989, the Russian Republic had no party congress. Delegates from provinces (oblasts, *kraia*, and autonomous subdivisions) in that republic were elected directly to the all-union party congress. Of course, at each level of the hierarchy the term *election* generally was a euphemism. By the norms of democratic centralism, party leaders at each level approved the makeup of the party conference or congress that ostensibly elected them, as well as the composition of party bodies on the next lowest level.

### **Republic Party Organization**

The republic party organization replicated the party structure on the all-union level except for the Russian Republic, which had no republic-level party organization in 1989. A congress, made up of delegates from the oblast or district and town organizations, elected a central committee to govern the republic in the five-year interval between party congresses. The central committee of the republic, which held a plenum once every four months, named a

bureau (in the case of the Ukrainian Republic, this body was called a politburo) and a secretariat to run the affairs of the republic between plenums of the central committee.

Full and candidate (nonvoting) members of republic bureaus included officials who held seats on this body by virtue of their party or government positions. Party officials who sat on the republic party bureaus normally included the first secretary of the republic and the second secretary for party-organizational work, as well as others selected from among the following: the first secretary of the party organization in the capital city of the republic, the chairman of the republic party control committee, and the first secretary of an outlying city or province. Government officials who could serve on the republic bureau were elected from among the following: the chairman of the republic's council of ministers, the chairman of the presidium of the republic's supreme soviet, the first deputy chairman of the republic's council of ministers, the republic's KGB chairman, and the troop commander of the Soviet armed forces stationed in the republic.

In 1989 the secretariats of the fourteen republic party organizations included a second secretary for party-organizational work and a secretary for ideology. The number of departments has, however, shrunk as the party has attempted to limit its role in economic management. Some sources also indicated the formation of commissions similar to those of the central party apparatus. Thus, the republic first secretaries in the Kazakh, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Moldavian republics and the second secretaries in the Belorussian and Turkmen republics assumed the chairmanships of their republics' commissions on state and legal policy.

With the exception of the Kazakh Republic (where a Russian, Gennadii Kolbin, served as first secretary), the first secretaries of the republic party organizations in 1989 were all members of their republic's dominant nationality. However, in 1989 the officials responsible for party-organizational work—the second secretaries—were predominantly Russians. (The Kazakh party's second secretary was Sergei M. Titarenko, a Ukrainian; the second secretary in the Ukrainian Republic was a Ukrainian.) The second secretary supervised cadre policy in the republic and hence managed the republic's *nomenklatura* appointments. As an official whose primary loyalty was to Moscow, the second secretary acted as a vehicle for the influence of the CPSU's central apparatus on the affairs of the republic's party organization and as a watchdog to ensure the republic organization's adherence to Moscow's demands.

## Oblast-Level Organization

Below the all-union organization in the Russian Republic (which sufficed for the Russian Republic's party organization in 1989) and the union republic party organizations in the Azerbaiydzhan, Belorussian, Georgian, Kazakh, Kirgiz, Tadzhik, Turkmen, Ukrainian, and Uzbek republics stood the oblast party organization, 122 of which existed in the Soviet Union in 1989. (Six large, thinly populated regions in the Russian Republic have been designated by the term *krai*; these regions are treated herein as oblasts.) The Armenian, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Moldavian republics had no oblasts. An oblast could embrace a large city or nationality unit. According to the *Party Rules*, the authoritative body in the province was the party conference, which met twice every five years and consisted of delegates elected by the district or city party conference. Between oblast party conferences, an oblast committee (*obkom*) comprising full and candidate members selected by the conference supervised the provincial party organization and, through it, the province as a whole. The oblast party committee met once every four months. That committee chose a bureau made up of voting and nonvoting members and a secretariat.

The bureau integrated officials from the most important sectors of the provincial party, economic, and governmental organizations into a unified political elite. Membership on the bureau enabled these officials to coordinate policies in their respective administrative spheres.

American Sovietologist Joel C. Moses found that as of the mid-1980s five different kinds of specialists served on the *obkom* bureau. The first category, composed of agricultural specialists, could be selected from among the *obkom* agricultural secretary, the agricultural administration of the oblast, or the *obkom* first secretary in predominantly rural regions. A second category of bureau membership consisted of industrial specialists, who were drawn from among the *obkom* industry secretary, the first secretary of the provincial capital (where most provincial industries were located), the provincial trade union council chairman, the first secretary of a large industrialized city district, or the *obkom* first secretary. Ideology specialists made up the third category. They were selected from the *obkom* secretary for ideology, the editor of the provincial party newspaper, or the first secretary of the Komsomol (see Glossary). A fourth category was the cadres specialist, who supervised *nomenklatura* appointments in the province. The cadres specialist on the provincial party bureau normally occupied one of the

*Monument in a Moscow park honoring Pavlik Morozov (1918-32). During collectivization the Soviet youth was murdered by local villagers for informing authorities about the illegal activities of his kulak relatives.*

*Courtesy Jimmy Pritchard*



following positions: *obkom* first secretary, head of the *obkom* party-organizational department, chairman of the provincial trade union council, or *obkom* cadres secretary. "Mixed generalists" made up the fifth category. These officials served on the *obkom* bureau to fulfill positions that required a broader background than those possessed by the functional specialists. A wide range of roles prepared the mixed generalists to carry out their tasks. Prior to serving on the provincial party bureau, these officials generally worked in industry, agriculture, party administration, or ideology.

Reform of the party's central apparatus, however, portended significant changes at the regional level. According to Georgii Kriuchkov, a senior official of the Central Committee, "the party is shedding the functions of dealing with day-to-day problems as they arise, because these problems are within the competence of the state, managerial, and public bodies." Hence, parts of the *obkom* bureau that paralleled government and managerial bodies—mainly in the area of economic management—were to be dismantled.

The first secretary of the party *obkom* was the most powerful official in the province. Paradoxically, much of that power stemmed from Soviet economic inefficiency. According to the norms of democratic centralism, the *obkom* secretary had to carry out decisions made by leaders at the all-union and republic levels of the party hierarchy. Nevertheless, the *obkom* secretary preserved some scope for independent political initiative on issues of national importance.

Initiative, perseverance, and ruthlessness were necessary characteristics of the successful *obkom* secretary, who had to aggregate scarce resources to meet economic targets and lobby central planners for low targets. Soviet émigré Alexander Yanov has argued that the interest of the *obkom* secretary, however, lay in preserving an inefficient provincial economy. Yanov has written that the *obkom* secretaries were "the fixers and chasers" after scarce resources who made the provincial economy work. If the economy were decentralized to allow greater initiative and if efforts were made to ensure greater agricultural productivity, one element of the *obkom* secretary's power—the ability to find resources to meet the plan—would diminish. For this reason, the *obkom* secretaries formed an important source of resistance to Khrushchev's efforts at economic reform (see Khrushchev's Reforms and Fall, ch. 2). Western observers held that these officials were an important source of opposition to Gorbachev's economic reforms because these reforms envisaged a greater role for the government and the market at the expense of the party.

### **District- and City-Level Organization**

In 1988 more than 3,400 district (*raion*) organizations made up the position in the CPSU hierarchy below that of the oblast. Of these organizations, 2,860 were located in rural areas and 570 in wards of cities. In addition, this hierarchical level encompassed 800 city (*gorod*) organizations.

The structure of these organizations resembled that of organizations on the republic and oblast levels. In theory, the party conference, with delegates selected by the PPOs in each district or city, elected a committee composed of full and candidate members. In practice, the party leadership in the district or town chose the delegates to the party conference and determined the composition of the district or town committee. Party conferences took place twice every five years. In the interim, the district committee (*raion komitet—raikom*) or city committee (*gorodskoi komitet—gorkom*) was the most authoritative body in the territory. The committee consisted of party officials, state officials, local Komsomol and trade union officers, the chairmen of the most important collective farms, the managers of the largest industrial enterprises, some PPO secretaries, and a few rank-and-file party members.

The *raikom* or *gorkom* elected a bureau and a secretariat, which supervised the daily affairs of the jurisdiction. The bureau numbered between ten and twelve members, who included party officials, state officials, and directors of the most important economic enterprises (see Glossary) in the district or city. The composition

of the bureau at this level varied with location. For example, the *gorkom* had no specialist for agriculture, and the rural *raikom* had no specialist for industry. The *raikom* and *gorkom* bureaus met two to three times per month to review the affairs of the district or city and to examine the reports of the PPOs.

The first secretary of the *raikom* or *gorkom* bureau headed the party organization at this level. As part of its *nomenklatura* authority, the oblast party organization made appointments to these positions. In 1987, however, reports of multicandidate elections for first secretary of a *raikom* appeared in the Soviet press. Two candidates competed for the position of *raikom* secretary in the Kemerovo and Vinnitsa districts. In the case of Kemerovo, *Pravda* reported that the oblast party secretary nominated the candidates, and the party conference at the district level settled the contest in a secret ballot. The Nineteenth Party Conference called for the institutionalization of multicandidate elections for these and other party positions.

The secretariat of a *raikom* and *gorkom* resembled that of the oblast party committee. In contrast to the party committee of the oblast level, however, the composition of this body varied with location. All had a department for agitation and propaganda; an organizational department, which staffed the positions for PPO secretaries and supervised the performance of the PPOs; and a general department, which coordinated the affairs of the district and city party organizations by circulating documents, administering party work, and preparing the agenda and materials for conferences, plenums, and bureau meetings. In 1988 the *raikom* or *gorkom* included a department for either agriculture or industry, which supervised those elements of the Soviet economy on the district level. In contrast to efforts to reduce the number of departments at higher levels of the party apparatus, no such reduction on the district level was planned as of early 1989.

As in the oblast, until the late 1980s the party organization in the district and city tended to involve itself in economic administration and production, which Gorbachev intended to place within the purview of the government. The CPSU judged its officials on their ability to meet and exceed the state economic plan. Party officials used their power as the representatives of the leading political institution in the country to engage themselves in economic administration. For fear of offending party officials and in the expectation that the party would solve their problems, until the late 1980s government and economic administrators were reluctant to exercise initiative and take responsibility in economic matters. The ability of *raikom* and *gorkom* secretaries to involve themselves in government activities formed one aspect of their power

and influence within their respective jurisdictions. During the Khrushchev era, these officials resisted reforms that led to a diminution of their responsibilities (see Khrushchev's Reforms and Fall, ch. 2).

## **Primary Party Organization**

In 1987 primary party organizations (PPOs) numbered 441,851. The PPO was the lowest rung on the party's organizational ladder. (PPOs were called party cells until 1934.) One PPO existed in every factory, office, collective farm, military unit, and education institution having more than three party members (see table 22, Appendix A). According to the *Party Rules*, the highest organ of the PPO was the party meeting, which comprised all party members in a given work unit. PPOs having more than fifty members could be divided into groups led by steering committees. Party meetings generally convened at least once a month, although the interim could be longer for PPOs having more than 300 members. The party meetings elected a bureau of two or three persons to supervise the affairs of the PPO. The secretary of the PPO, nominally elected by the party meeting but actually appointed by the next highest party organization, managed the work of the PPO and was a full-time, salaried member of the party.

The PPO performed many important tasks. It admitted new members into the party; apprised rank-and-file party members of their duties, obligations, and rights within the party; organized agitation and propaganda sessions to educate party members in the ideology of Marxism-Leninism; stimulated productivity in the enterprise; encouraged efficiency and effectiveness of production methods and innovation; and disciplined party members for dereliction of their duties. An enumeration of the activities of the PPO only begins to suggest the importance of this organization to the party. For several reasons, the PPO was an important factor underlying the party's control over society. The PPO possessed what was known as the right of verification (*pravo kontrolia*), checking how managers met the demands of their position and how faithfully they implemented the plan for their enterprise. This power led to the PPO secretary's involvement in the day-to-day affairs of the enterprise. Moreover, factory managers or chairmen of collective farms, as well as chiefs of the enterprise trade unions normally were party members; consequently, they were bound by democratic centralism to follow the orders and suggestions of their party leader, the PPO secretary. Thus, the PPO secretary and not the manager carried primary responsibility to the party for the work of the enterprise.

The PPO itself was also critical to the implementation of the economic plan. The state devised its economic plan on the basis of party requirements. The government implemented the party's plan, and therefore the norms of democratic centralism obligated the PPOs to enforce it. At the enterprise level, the principal activity of the PPO secretary and of all party members was to stimulate production. Party members had to set an example with their work and encourage nonmembers to fulfill their production quotas and improve their labor productivity.

The PPO not only conveyed party policies to nonmembers in the enterprise but also apprised the party hierarchy of the mood of the masses and prevented the formation of groups to promote grass-roots change. Rank-and-file party members were scattered throughout the Soviet Union. Party members had hands-on experience in their jobs and knew nonparty members personally. Because of this intimate knowledge of their surroundings, party members were in a position to inform their superiors about the concerns and problems of people in all walks of life. With this knowledge, the party could take steps to stem potential sources of unrest, to institute new methods of control, and, more generally, to tailor its policies toward the maintenance of the population's political quiescence.

## **Nomenklatura**

The *nomenklatura* referred to the CPSU's authority to make appointments to key positions throughout the governmental system, as well as throughout the party's own hierarchy. Specifically, the *nomenklatura* consisted of two separate lists: one was for key positions, appointments to which were made by authorities within the party; the other was for persons who were potential candidates for appointment to those positions. The Politburo, as part of its *nomenklatura* authority, maintained a list of ministerial and ambassadorial positions that it had the power to fill as well as a separate list of potential candidates to occupy those positions.

Coextensive with the *nomenklatura* were patron-client relations. Officials who had the authority to appoint individuals to certain positions cultivated loyalties among those whom they appointed. The patron (the official making the appointment) promoted the interests of clients in return for their support. Powerful patrons, such as the members of the Politburo, had many clients. Moreover, an official could be both a client (in relation to a higher-level patron) and a patron (to other, lower-level officials).

Because a client was beholden to his patron for his position, the client was eager to please his patron by carrying out his policies.

The Soviet power structure essentially consisted of groups of vassals (clients) who had an overlord (the patron). The higher the patron, the more clients the patron had. Patrons protected their clients and tried to promote their careers. In return for the patron's efforts to promote their careers, the clients remained loyal to their patron. Thus, by promoting his clients' careers, the patron could advance his own power.

### **The Party's Appointment Authority**

The *nomenklatura* system arose early in Soviet history. Lenin wrote that appointments were to take the following criteria into account: reliability, political attitude, qualifications, and administrative ability. Stalin, who was the first general secretary of the party, also was known as "Comrade File Cabinet" (*Tovarishch Kartotekov*) for his assiduous attention to the details of the party's appointments. Seeking to make appointments in a more systematic fashion, Stalin built the party's patronage system and used it to distribute his clients throughout the party bureaucracy (see Stalin's Rise to Power, ch. 2). Under Stalin's direction in 1922, the party created departments of the Central Committee and other organs at lower levels that were responsible for the registration and appointment of party officials. Known as *uchraspredy*, these organs supervised appointments to important party posts. According to American Sovietologist Seweryn Bialer, after Brezhnev's accession to power in October 1964, the party considerably expanded its appointment authority. However, in the late 1980s some official statements indicated that the party intended to reduce its appointment authority, particularly in the area of economic management, in line with Gorbachev's reform efforts.

At the all-union level, the Party Building and Cadre Work Department supervised party *nomenklatura* appointments. This department maintained records on party members throughout the country, made appointments to positions on the all-union level, and approved *nomenklatura* appointments on the lower levels of the hierarchy. The head of this department sometimes was a member of the Secretariat and was often a protégé of the general secretary.

Every party committee and party organizational department—from the all-union level in Moscow to the district and city levels—prepared two lists according to their needs. The basic (*osnovnaia*) list detailed positions in the political, administrative, economic, military, cultural, and educational bureaucracies that the committee and its department had responsibility for filling. The registered (*uchetnaia*) list enumerated the persons suitable for these positions.

## **Patron-Client Relations**

An official in the party or government bureaucracy could not advance in the *nomenklatura* without the assistance of a patron. In return for this assistance in promoting his career, the client carried out the policies of the patron. Patron-client relations thus help to explain the ability of party leaders to generate support for their policies. The presence of patron-client relations between party officials and officials in other bureaucracies also helped to account for the control the party exercised over Soviet society. All of the 2 million members of the *nomenklatura* system understood that they held their positions as a result of a favor bestowed on them by a superior official in the party and that they could be replaced if they manifested disloyalty to their patron. Self-interest dictated that members of the *nomenklatura* submit to the control of their patrons in the party.

Clients sometimes could attempt to supplant their overlord. For example, Khrushchev, one of Lazar M. Kaganovich's former protégés, helped to oust the latter in 1957. Seven years later, Brezhnev, a client of Khrushchev, helped to remove his boss from power. The power of the general secretary was consolidated to the extent that he placed his clients in positions of power and influence (see General Secretary: Power and Authority, this ch.). The ideal for the general secretary, writes Soviet émigré observer Michael Voslensky, "is to be overlord of vassals selected by oneself."

Several factors explain the entrenchment of patron-client relations. First, in a centralized nondemocratic government system, promotion in the bureaucratic-political hierarchy was the only path to power. Second, the most important criterion for promotion in this hierarchy was not merit but approval from one's supervisors, who evaluated their subordinates on the basis of political criteria and their ability to contribute to the fulfillment of the economic plan. Third, political rivalries were present at all levels of the party and state bureaucracies but were especially prevalent at the top. Power and influence decided the outcomes of these struggles, and the number and positions of one's clients were critical components of that power and influence. Fourth, because fulfillment of the economic plan was decisive, systemic pressures led officials to conspire together and use their ties to achieve that goal.

The faction led by Brezhnev provides a good case study of patron-client relations in the Soviet system. Many members of the Brezhnev faction came from Dnepropetrovsk, where Brezhnev had served as first secretary of the provincial party organization. Andrei P. Kirilenko, a Politburo member and Central Committee secretary

under Brezhnev, was first secretary of the regional committee of Dnepropetrovsk. Volodymyr Shcherbyts'kyy, named as first secretary of the Ukrainian apparatus under Brezhnev, succeeded Kirilenko in that position. Nikolai A. Tikhonov, appointed by Brezhnev as first deputy chairman of the Soviet Union's Council of Ministers, graduated from the Dnepropetrovsk College of Metallurgy and presided over the economic council of Dnepropetrovskaya Oblast. Finally, Nikolai A. Shchelokov, minister of internal affairs under Brezhnev, was a former chairman of the Dnepropetrovsk soviet.

Patron-client relations had implications for policy making in the party and government bureaucracies. Promotion of trusted subordinates into influential positions facilitated policy formation and policy execution. A network of clients helped to ensure that a patron's policies could be carried out. In addition, patrons relied on their clients to provide an accurate flow of information on events throughout the country. This information assisted policy makers in ensuring that their programs were being implemented.

## **Party Membership**

The CPSU placed stringent requirements on its membership. Party members had to work indefatigably on the party's behalf, actively participate in the political life of the country, and set a moral and political example for those who were not members of the party. Despite these obligations, the benefits of membership compelled many to join the party. Membership in the CPSU was a requirement for career advancement. In addition, a career in the party could also serve as a means for upward mobility from the working class or peasantry into white-collar positions. Moreover, for those interested in political activities, the party was a vehicle for political participation.

Party members had a duty to increase their political knowledge and qualifications. Such efforts indicated a willingness to make a career of party work. The CPSU has set up a series of party schools whose courses range in difficulty from the elementary to the advanced. These schools were located at the local, intermediate, and all-union levels of the political system. Training in party schools strengthened the ideological, political, and administrative abilities of party members, especially officials of the CPSU apparatus. Although the stated purpose of party training was to better equip party members to perform their jobs, it acted as one additional means to promote a common outlook and ideological perspective among members of the party apparatus.



*Honor boards, such as this one in Narva, Estonian Republic, recognized the work of CPSU members.*  
Courtesy Jonathan Tetzlaff

### Selection Procedures

The standards for admission into the CPSU required that a person be at least eighteen years old, have a good personal record, and possess some knowledge of the principles of Marxism-Leninism. Those who wanted to become party members had to secure references from at least three party members of at least five years' standing. In the case of prospective members entering the party from the Komsomol, one of the references had to have been written by a member of the Komsomol city or district committee. These references attested to the candidate's moral, civic, and professional qualities.

Only the PPO general meeting could accept or reject an application for membership (see Primary Party Organization, this ch.). Before the general meeting, however, the PPO secretary reviewed that person's application, and the secretary's recommendations counted heavily in the selection process. The district or town party committee then confirmed the acceptance of the prospective member. Upon acceptance, the individual became a candidate (non-voting) member of the party for one year. The new candidate paid an admission fee of 2 rubles (for value of the ruble—see Glossary)

and monthly dues that varied from 10 kopeks to 3 percent of salary, depending on the person's income.

During the candidate stage, the individual had to faithfully carry out responsibilities assigned by the party. Candidates had to demonstrate their ability to cope with the obligations of party membership, which included attendance at party meetings, improvements in labor productivity, and efforts to strengthen one's understanding of Marxism-Leninism. After one year, the candidate had to again solicit recommendations from three members of five years' standing and undergo a review by the PPO secretary. The PPO general meeting then voted on the candidate's application for full membership, and the district or city organization confirmed the acceptance of the full member.

The *Party Rules* defined many obligations for CPSU members. For example, the party member had to resolutely execute the general line and directives of the party, explain to the nonparty masses the foreign and domestic policies of the CPSU, and facilitate the strengthening of the party's bonds with the people. In addition, party members had to strive to increase productivity in their regular jobs, improve the quality of their work, and "inject into the economy the achievements of science and technology." The *Party Rules* required that members participate in party activities, broaden their political horizons, and struggle against any manifestation of bourgeois ideology and religious prejudices. Party members had to strictly observe the norms of communist morality, place social interests higher than personal interests, and exhibit modesty and orderliness. Party members also undertook criticism of other members and self-criticism in meetings. Criticism and self-criticism uncovered conflicts, mistakes, and shortcomings that resulted from personal or organizational inadequacies. Once flaws were uncovered, criticism and self-criticism generated peer pressure to remove the problem. Finally, party members had to consistently promote the foreign policy of the Soviet Union and work to strengthen the defense forces of the country.

In addition to their obligations, full members of the CPSU had certain rights. They participated in elections of candidates to party organs, and they could be chosen for positions in the hierarchy. At party meetings, conferences, meetings of party committees, and in the party press, party members could freely discuss issues connected with the policy and activities of the party. According to the *Party Rules*, party members could criticize any party organ and any other party member (including members of the leadership) at party meetings, plenums and conferences, and congresses at all levels of the party hierarchy. The norms of democratic centralism precluded

such criticism, however. Any party member brave enough to make such criticism would have been subject to party discipline and possible exclusion from the CPSU. A party member had the right to participate in party meetings, bureau sessions, and committees when these bodies discussed that person's activities or behavior. In addition, a party member could submit questions, statements, and suggestions to any party body, including the Central Committee, and demand a reply.

The party could take several forms of disciplinary action against members who broke its rules. The lightest penalty was a reprimand, followed by a censure. Both of these measures were entered into the member's permanent party record. A harsher punishment was reduction to candidate status for one year. For severe rule infractions, a party member could be expelled. The stigma attached to expulsion from the party remained with the individual throughout his life and precluded career advancement, access to better housing facilities, and educational opportunities for the person's children. In some instances, expelled party members have lost high-status positions.

Another form of disciplinary action, which occurred on a wider scale, was the so-called "exchange of party documents." This entailed a review of the party's membership and discussions between party members and their superiors, followed by replacement of old party cards. The exchange of party documents provided an occasion for the CPSU to rid itself of members who breached party discipline. Party sources reported that exchanges of party cards were not purges (see *The Period of the Purges*, ch. 2). Nevertheless, the Russian word *chistka*, which means purge, was the term the party used to describe these exchanges. The last exchange of party documents occurred in 1975.

Several reasons accounted for the desire of Soviet citizens to join the party, despite the stringent obligations it placed upon its members and the formal nature of their rights. The primary reason for joining the party was opportunity for career advancement and social mobility. Party membership was a prerequisite for promotion to managerial positions in Soviet society. In addition, party membership opened up the possibility for travel abroad, admission to special shops for consumer goods, access to Western media, and cash bonuses for work. Party membership also provided the chance for upward mobility from the working class or peasantry into professional, white-collar positions in the party apparatus. Children of lower-class parents tended to enter this "political class" in order to raise their status. Having become members of this class, these

people could then ensure their offspring access to the amenities Soviet life has to offer.

Party membership had other, less tangible rewards. It enabled an individual to claim membership in an organization linked to Russian historical tradition, to the Bolshevik Revolution, and to the world-historical movement the CPSU claimed to lead. In addition, as the dominant political institution in society, the party offered the most important outlet for political participation. These benefits encouraged a feeling of in-group solidarity with other members of the CPSU and a sense of civic efficacy.

## **Training**

The CPSU obligated its members constantly to improve their understanding of Marxism-Leninism and political qualifications. Toward these goals, the party operated a series of schools to train party members in Marxism-Leninism, to recruit rank-and-file members into its administration, and to communicate party principles and policies to the membership, particularly to officials in the apparatus.

Party schools operated at all levels of the hierarchy. The primary party schools formed the elementary level of the training system. These schools were informal; they could be as simple as a circle of workers who met after work to discuss the life of Lenin, political and economic affairs, or current party policies. Since the mid-1960s, enrollments in these schools have been declining because of the increased education level of the population. These courses were open to nonmembers, whose participation could be used to demonstrate a desire to join the party. Trade unions and the Komsomol administered schools with similar levels of instruction. Trade unions operated "people's universities" and "schools of communist labor." The former treated a variety of topics and enrolled students in a group that advanced as a class from level to level. Schools of communist labor were oriented to problems of production. Lectures often dealt with the correct attitude toward work.

The party had a variety of schools at the intermediate level. Schools of the Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism, administered by district and city party committees, required some knowledge of Marxism-Leninism. Classes were small, which permitted individual attention to students and the examination of subject matter in detail. Courses in these schools reviewed the fundamentals of party doctrine and included subjects such as party history, political economy, and Marxist-Leninist philosophy. Since the mid-1970s, enrollment in these schools has grown. In 1981 the party

formed the Schools for Young Communists. These institutions offered instruction to candidate members of the party and to people who had recently become full members.

The Schools of Scientific Communism offered more specialized instruction at the intermediate level. In 1989 topics included current events in domestic and international affairs. Schools for the party's economic specialists offered training in such areas as party direction of trade unions, economic policy, and the theory of developed socialism. Schools for ideological specialists included courses for PPO secretaries and group leaders, party lecturers, and media personnel. These schools offered courses on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and on the means and methods of the party's control over ideological affairs.

Party training at the intermediate level also encompassed seminars in Marxist-Leninist theory and methods. Members of the scientific intelligentsia and professors at institutions of higher education attended these seminars. Subjects included philosophical and social science topics: the scientific-technical revolution, economics, the theory of proletarian internationalism, communist morality, and socialist democracy.

Finally, the party offered courses for raising the qualifications of party and soviet officials at the provincial and republic levels. These courses involved supplementary training in a variety of subjects first treated in lower-level party schools. Party officials also could take correspondence courses offered either by the higher party school of their republic or under the auspices of the Academy of Social Sciences of the CPSU Central Committee.

At the all-union level, the Higher Party School and the Academy of Social Sciences in Moscow were staffed with instructors attached to the CPSU Central Committee departments (see Secretariat, this ch.). These schools trained officials to enter the party elite at the all-union level. The Higher Party School graduated about 300 students per year; the Academy of Social Sciences graduated approximately 100.

Training at party schools served a variety of purposes. Willingness to participate in party courses at the lowest level could indicate an aspiration to join the party or ensure advancement from candidate status to that of full member. Once in the party, participation in training courses demonstrated a desire to enter into full-time, salaried party work. Indeed, such coursework was a prerequisite for this kind of a career. Party training also created an in-group consciousness among those who attended courses, particularly at the intermediate and all-union levels. Various kinds of specialists from wide-ranging backgrounds took these courses;

hence, party schools integrated officials from all sectors of the party and government bureaucracies and inculcated a shared consciousness of their duties and status. Equally important, party schools, according to American Soviet specialists Frederick C. Barghoorn and Thomas F. Remington, underscored the CPSU's legitimacy by providing a theoretical basis for its policies. Courses in party schools examined current events and policy issues from the party's perspective. Thus, party training counteracted the insular viewpoints that could arise as a result of officials' attention to their narrow fields of specialization.

## **Social Composition of the Party**

The Bolshevik organization began as a tightly knit group of revolutionaries whose leadership was dominated by members of the Russian, Jewish, and Polish intelligentsia but whose mass base consisted mainly of industrial workers from Russia's largest cities. By the late 1980s, for the most part the social characteristics of the party membership reflected the social and economic changes the Soviet Union had undergone over the more than seventy years of its existence. Consequently, professionals made up a percentage of party membership that exceeded their percentage of the population, and the number of party members with a secondary or higher education has constantly risen since the mid-1930s. Similarly, the party has recruited its members from all nationalities. As a result, the gap between the ethnic groups that dominated the party and other ethnic groups in the early years has narrowed. However, this gap has not disappeared completely. By contrast, the percentage of women in the party has continued to lag behind the percentage of women in the population. Altogether, the social characteristics of party members confirmed their status as an elite in the society. The social composition of the party reflected the decision made by Stalin in the 1930s and reaffirmed since that time both to make professional achievement and merit the primary criteria for admission into the party and to strive for the proportional representation of all groups within the party's ranks.

In 1987 the CPSU numbered more than 19 million members (see table 23, Appendix A). Party members constituted about 9.7 percent of the adult population. This figure represented an increase of 4 percent since 1956. Most of that increase, however, reflected the CPSU's rapid growth between 1956 and 1964 under the leadership of Khrushchev. Since 1971 the share of party membership in the adult population has risen only 0.3 percent.

In general, party members possessed a high occupational status in society, which belied the party's claims to be the vanguard of

the working class. The party did not publish statistics on the social status of its membership. Nevertheless, the CPSU did publish statistics on its membership's "social position," which denoted the class affiliation of members at the time they joined the CPSU. Workers and peasants who joined the party often used their membership to advance into white-collar positions. Were statistics available on the social status of party members, they would reveal the disproportional representation of white-collar professionals in party ranks. Available figures on the social position of party members, however, also indicated the importance of professionals in the party (see table 24, Appendix A). In 1987 persons who were members of the white-collar professions when they joined the CPSU made up 43.1 percent of the party, while those who were members of the working class made up 45.3 percent and those who were peasants made up 11.6 percent. By contrast, in 1987 Soviet sources reported that 27.8 percent of the working population consisted of white-collar professionals, 62.7 were workers, and 9.5 percent were peasants. The high percentage of members who were professionals when they joined the party, together with the accelerated advancement into white-collar positions by members who were workers or peasants, suggested that the CPSU was not a proletarian party but rather one dominated by white-collar professionals.

Statistics on the percentage of party members with higher education replicated this pattern (see table 25, Appendix A). Between 1967 and 1987, the percentage of party members who had completed higher education almost doubled. In 1987 over 32 percent of the party membership had received a degree from an institution of higher education. By contrast, in that same year only 7.3 percent of the general population had received a similar degree. Again, the figures indicate that the CPSU was less the party of the working class than the party of the white-collar intelligentsia.

The ethnic composition of the party reflected further disproportions between the party and the population as a whole (see table 26, Appendix A). In 1922 the share of Russian members in the party exceeded their proportion of the population by 19 percent. Since that time, the gap between Russians and other nationalities has narrowed. In 1979 Russians constituted 52 percent of the Soviet population; however, they constituted 60 percent of the party in 1981. Moreover, the percentage of Russians in the party apparatus was probably even greater than their percentage in the party as a whole.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, other major nationalities whose share of party membership exceeded their proportion of the population were the Belorussians, the Georgians, and the Jews (the

percentage of Jews in the party was twice their percentage in the Soviet population as a whole). The proportion of Ukrainians and Armenians in the party equaled their share of the Soviet population. Armenians and Jews shared certain characteristics that help explain their relatively high proportion of party membership. Members of these nationalities tended to be more urbanized, educated, and geographically mobile than the norm. These characteristics correlated strongly with party membership. The Georgians, although not as urbanized as the Armenians or the Jews, tended to be highly educated. Other reasons explained the relatively high percentage of party membership among the Belorussians and Ukrainians. These two East Slavic nationalities are culturally close to the Russians. In addition, the central party apparatus has sought to demonstrate that political opportunities for Belorussians and Ukrainians equal those for Russians.

Those major nationalities having the lowest proportion of party members compared with their share of the population were the Tadzhiks, Uzbeks, Kirgiz, and Turkmens of Central Asia, and the Moldavians. The Central Asians resisted membership in an organization they perceived to be dominated by East Slavs in general and Russians in particular. Similar considerations applied to the Moldavians, whose territory the Soviet Union seized from Romania in World War II (see Other Major Nationalities, ch. 4).

The percentage of women in the party lagged far behind the proportion of women in the population (see table 27, Appendix A). In 1987 women comprised 29.3 percent of the party and 53 percent of the population. Several reasons explained women's lack of interest in joining the party. First, party work required a substantial commitment of time from each member (see Selection Procedures, this ch.). Approximately 80 percent of Soviet women held jobs and, in addition, spent long hours caring for children, shopping, and running households. Second, Muslim peoples, who constituted a high percentage of the Soviet population, discouraged female participation in politics. Third, Soviet women might not enter the CPSU because they perceived that the social mores of that organization restricted their ability to move up the hierarchy into positions of power. The 307 members elected to the CPSU Central Committee at the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress in 1986 included only 13 women. In the 1980s, women made up only about 33 percent of PPO secretaries, 20 percent of district party organization secretaries, and 3.2 percent of *obkom* bureau members. No woman has been a full member of the Politburo. Thus, the higher the level in the party hierarchy, the lower the percentage of women.

In his report to the CPSU Central Committee on January 27, 1987, General Secretary Gorbachev called for the promotion of more women and representatives of national minorities and ethnic groups into leading positions in the party. That policy, together with the pursuit of other policies that encourage greater urbanization, geographic mobility, and higher education levels, may lead to a greater proportion of women and national minorities in influential party positions. If women and national minorities perceive the opportunity to move up the hierarchy into positions of power, a greater number of these underrepresented groups might be willing to join the party and thus help to balance the sexual and ethnic composition of the CPSU with that of the population as a whole.

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A plethora of works has been written on all aspects of the CPSU. The following general works on the Soviet Union contain chapters on the party: John A. Armstrong's *Ideology, Politics, and Government in the Soviet Union*, John N. Hazard's *The Soviet System of Government*, and Frederick C. Barghoorn and Thomas F. Remington's *Politics in the USSR*. The best general treatment of the CPSU is found in *The Soviet Communist Party* by Ronald J. Hill and Peter Frank. A number of specialized treatments of various aspects of the party also have been written. Alfred G. Meyer's *Leninism* remains a classic study of the thought, political program, and tactics of Lenin. Nina Tumarkin's *Lenin Lives!* examines the Lenin cult in the Soviet Union. George Breslauer's *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders* treats attempts by Khrushchev and Brezhnev to build authority in the political system. For thorough analyses of intermediate-level and local-level party organizations, works by Joel C. Moses are helpful. Scholars who have examined the *nomenklatura* and patron-client relations include John P. Willerton, Jr., Bohdan Harasymiw, and Gyula Jozsza. Michael Voslensky's *Nomenklatura* provides an insider's account of the ruling class. John H. Miller's "The Communist Party" treats the social characteristics of the CPSU's membership. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)



## **Chapter 8. Government Structure and Functions**



*Meeting of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet*

**THE GOVERNMENT OF** the Soviet Union administered the country's economy and society. It implemented decisions made by the leading political institution in the country, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

In the late 1980s, the government appeared to have many characteristics in common with Western, democratic political systems. For instance, a constitution established all organs of government and granted to citizens a series of political and civic rights. A legislative body, the Congress of People's Deputies, and its standing legislature, the Supreme Soviet, represented the principle of popular sovereignty. The Supreme Soviet, which had an elected chairman who functioned as head of state, oversaw the Council of Ministers, which acted as the executive branch of the government. The chairman of the Council of Ministers, whose selection was approved by the legislative branch, functioned as head of government. A constitutionally based judicial branch of government included a court system, headed by the Supreme Court, that was responsible for overseeing the observance of Soviet law by government bodies. According to the Constitution of 1977, the government had a federal structure, permitting the republics some authority over policy implementation and offering the national minorities the appearance of participation in the management of their own affairs.

In practice, however, the government differed markedly from Western systems. In the late 1980s, the CPSU performed many functions that governments of other countries usually perform. For example, the party decided on the policy alternatives that the government ultimately implemented. The government merely ratified the party's decisions to lend them an aura of legitimacy. The CPSU used a variety of mechanisms to ensure that the government adhered to its policies. The party, using its *nomenklatura* (see Glossary) authority, placed its loyalists in leadership positions throughout the government, where they were subject to the norms of democratic centralism (see Glossary). Party bodies closely monitored the actions of government ministries, agencies, and legislative organs.

The content of the Soviet Constitution differed in many ways from typical Western constitutions. It generally described existing political relationships, as determined by the CPSU, rather than prescribing an ideal set of political relationships. The Constitution was long and detailed, giving technical specifications for individual

organs of government. The Constitution included political statements, such as foreign policy goals, and provided a theoretical definition of the state within the ideological framework of Marxism-Leninism (see Glossary). The CPSU could radically change the constitution or remake it completely, as it has done several times in the past.

The Council of Ministers acted as the executive body of the government. Its most important duties lay in the administration of the economy. The council was thoroughly under the control of the CPSU, and its chairman—the prime minister—was always a member of the Politburo (see Politburo, ch. 7). The council, which in 1989 included more than 100 members, was too large and unwieldy to act as a unified executive body. The council's Presidium, made up of the leading economic administrators and led by the chairman, exercised dominant power within the Council of Ministers.

According to the Constitution, as amended in 1988, the highest legislative body in the Soviet Union was the Congress of People's Deputies, which convened for the first time in May 1989. The main tasks of the congress were the election of the standing legislature, the Supreme Soviet, and the election of the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, who acted as head of state. Theoretically, the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet wielded enormous legislative power. In practice, however, the Congress of People's Deputies met only a few days in 1989 to approve decisions made by the party, the Council of Ministers, and its own Supreme Soviet. The Supreme Soviet, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, and the Council of Ministers had substantial authority to enact laws, decrees, resolutions, and orders binding on the population. The Congress of People's Deputies had the authority to ratify these decisions.

The government lacked an independent judiciary. The Supreme Court supervised the lower courts and applied the law, as established by the Constitution or as interpreted by the Supreme Soviet. The Constitutional Oversight Committee reviewed the constitutionality of laws and acts. The Soviet Union lacked an adversary court procedure. Under Soviet law, which derived from Roman law, a procurator (see Glossary) worked together with a judge and a defense attorney to ensure that civil and criminal trials uncovered the truth of the case, rather than protecting individual rights.

The Soviet Union was a federal state made up of fifteen republics joined together in a theoretically voluntary union. In turn, a series of territorial units made up the republics. The republics also

contained jurisdictions intended to protect the interests of national minorities. The republics had their own constitutions, which, along with the all-union (see Glossary) Constitution, provide the theoretical division of power in the Soviet Union. In 1989, however, the CPSU and the central government retained all significant authority, setting policies that were executed by republic, provincial (*oblast*, *krai*—see Glossary, and autonomous subdivision), and district (*raion*—see Glossary) governments.

## **Constitutional Authority of Government**

The political theory underlying the Soviet Constitution differed from the political theory underlying constitutions in the West. Democratic constitutions are fundamentally prescriptive; they define a set of political relations to which their governments and citizens aspire. By contrast, Soviet constitutions have purported to describe a set of political relationships already in existence. Thus, as changes have occurred in the socioeconomic and political systems, the government has adopted new constitutions that have conformed to the new sets of realities.

The 1977 Constitution was generally descriptive; it differed from past constitutions in containing a preamble and a section on foreign policy that were prescriptive in tone. The Soviet Union has had a series of four constitutions, ratified in 1918, 1924, 1936, and 1977, respectively. On the surface, the four constitutions have resembled many constitutions adopted in the West. The differences between Soviet and Western constitutions, however, overshadowed the similarities. Soviet constitutions appeared to guarantee certain political rights, such as freedom of speech, assembly, and religious belief. They also identified a series of economic and social rights, as well as a set of duties that obligated all citizens. Nevertheless, Soviet constitutions did not contain provisions guaranteeing the inalienable rights of the citizenry, and they lacked the machinery to protect individual rights contained in many democratic constitutions. Thus, the population enjoyed political rights only to the extent that these rights conformed to the interests of building socialism (see Glossary). The CPSU alone reserved the authority to determine what lay in the interests of socialism. Finally, Soviet constitutions specified the form and content of regime symbols, such as the arms, the flag, and the state anthem.

The four constitutions had provisions in common. These provisions expressed the theoretical sovereignty of the working class and the leading role of the CPSU in government and society. All the constitutions have upheld the forms of socialist property (see

Glossary). Each of the constitutions has called for a system of soviets, or councils, to exercise governmental authority.

## **Early Soviet Constitutions**

In the *Civil War in France, 1848–1850*, Karl Marx maintained that constitutions ought to reflect existing class and political relationships, not prescribe the nature of such relations. Vladimir I. Lenin adopted Marx's understanding of the role of constitutions in a state. Of certain provisions in the first Soviet constitution, he wrote that they were embodied in it “*after* they were already in actual practice.” Joseph V. Stalin rejected a prescriptive preamble for the 1936 constitution, stating that the constitution should “register” the gains of socialism rather than prescribe “future achievement.” The four Soviet constitutions thus have reflected the changes that government and society have undergone over the course of Soviet history.

### ***The 1918 Constitution***

The first constitution, which governed the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, described the regime that assumed power in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 (see Revolutions and Civil War, ch. 2). This constitution formally recognized the Bolshevik (see Glossary) party organization as the ruler of Russia according to the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat (see Glossary). The constitution also stated that under the leadership of the Bolsheviks the workers formed a political alliance with the peasants. This constitution gave broad guarantees of equal rights to workers and peasants. It denied, however, the right of social groups that opposed the new government or supported the White armies in the Civil War (1918–21) to participate in elections to the soviets or to hold political power.

Supreme power rested with the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, made up of deputies from local soviets across Russia. The steering committee of the Congress of Soviets—known as the Central Executive Committee—acted as the “supreme organ of power” between sessions of the congress and as the collective presidency of the state.

The congress recognized the Council of People's Commissars (Sovet narodnykh komissarov—Sovnarkom) as the administrative arm of the young government. (The Sovnarkom had exercised governmental authority from November 1917 until the adoption of the 1918 constitution.) The constitution made the Sovnarkom responsible to the Congress of Soviets for the “general administration of the affairs of the state.” The constitution enabled the

Sovnarkom to issue decrees carrying the full force of law when the congress was not in session. The congress then routinely approved these decrees at its next session.

### ***The 1924 Constitution***

The 1924 constitution legitimated the December 1922 union of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, the Ukrainian Republic, the Belorussian Republic, and the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This constitution also altered the structure of the central government. It eliminated the Congress of Soviets and established the Central Executive Committee as the supreme body of state authority. In turn, the constitution divided the Central Executive Committee into the Soviet of the Union, which would represent the constituent republics, and the Soviet of Nationalities, which would represent the interests of nationality groups. The Presidium of the Central Executive Committee served as the collective presidency. Between sessions of the Central Executive Committee, the Presidium supervised the government administration. The Central Executive Committee also elected the Sovnarkom, which served as the executive arm of the government.

### ***The 1936 Constitution***

The 1936 constitution, adopted on December 5, 1936, and also known as the “Stalin” constitution, redesigned the government. The constitution repealed restrictions on voting and added universal direct suffrage and the right to work to rights guaranteed by the previous constitution. The constitution also provided for the direct election of all government bodies and their reorganization into a single, uniform system.

The 1936 constitution changed the name of the Central Executive Committee to the Supreme Soviet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Like its predecessor, the Supreme Soviet contained two chambers: the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities. The constitution empowered the Supreme Soviet to elect commissions, which performed most of the Supreme Soviet’s work. As under the former constitution, the Presidium exercised the full powers of the Supreme Soviet between sessions and had the right to interpret laws. The chairman of the Presidium became the titular head of state. The Sovnarkom (after 1946 known as the Council of Ministers) continued to act as the executive arm of the government.

### ***The 1977 Constitution***

On October 7, 1977, the Supreme Soviet unanimously adopted

the fourth constitution, also known as the "Brezhnev" Constitution, named after CPSU general secretary Leonid I. Brezhnev (see Supreme Soviet, this ch.). The preamble stated that "the aims of the dictatorship of the proletariat having been fulfilled, the Soviet state has become the state of the whole people." That is, according to the new Constitution, the government no longer represented the workers alone but expressed "the will and interests of the workers, peasants, and intelligentsia, the working people of all nations and nationalities in the country." Compared with previous constitutions, the Brezhnev Constitution extended the bounds of constitutional regulation of society. The first chapter defined the leading role of the CPSU and established principles for the management of the state and the government. Later chapters established principles for economic management and cultural relations.

The 1977 Constitution was long and detailed. It included twenty-eight more articles than the 1936 constitution. The Constitution explicitly defined the division of responsibilities between the central and republic governments. For example, the Constitution placed the regulation of boundaries and administrative divisions within the jurisdiction of the republics. However, provisions established the rules under which the republics could make such changes. Thus, the Constitution concentrated on the operation of the government system as a whole.

#### *Amendments to the 1977 Constitution*

In October 1988, draft amendments and additions to the 1977 Constitution were published in the Soviet media for public discussion. Following the public review process, the Supreme Soviet adopted the amendments and additions in December 1988. The amendments and additions substantially and fundamentally changed the electoral and political systems. Although Soviet officials touted the changes as a return to "Leninist" forms and functions, citing that the Congress of People's Deputies had antecedents in the Congress of Soviets, they were unprecedented in many respects (see Central Government, this ch.). The position of chairman of the Supreme Soviet was formally designated and given specific powers, particularly leadership over the legislative agenda, the ability to issue orders (*rasporiazheniya*), and formal power to conduct negotiations and sign treaties with foreign governments and international organizations. The Constitutional Oversight Committee, composed of people who were not in the Congress of People's Deputies, was established and given formal power to review the constitutionality of laws and normative acts of the central and republic governments and to suggest their suspension and

repeal. The electoral process was constitutionally opened up to multiple candidacies, although not to multiple-party candidacies. A legislative body—the Supreme Soviet—was to convene for regular spring and fall sessions, each lasting three to four months. Unlike the old Supreme Soviet, however, the new Supreme Soviet was indirectly elected by the population, being elected from among the members of the Congress of People's Deputies.

### ***Amendment Process***

Adoption of the Constitution was a legislative act of the Supreme Soviet. Amendments to the Constitution were likewise adopted by legislative act of that body. Amendments required the approval of a two-thirds majority of the deputies of the Congress of People's Deputies and could be initiated by the congress itself; the Supreme Soviet, acting through its commissions and committees; the Presidium or chairman of the Supreme Soviet; the Constitutional Oversight Committee; the Council of Ministers; republic soviets; the Committee of People's Control; the Supreme Court; the Procuracy; and the chief state arbiter. In addition, the leading boards of official organizations and even the Academy of Sciences (see Glossary) could initiate amendments and other legislation.

Soviet constitutions have been frequently amended and have been changed more often than in the West. Nevertheless, the 1977 Constitution attempted to avoid frequent amendment by establishing regulations for government bodies in separate, but equally authoritative, enabling legislation, such as the Law on the Council of Ministers of July 5, 1978. Other enabling legislation has included a law on citizenship, a law on elections to the Supreme Soviet, a law on the status of Supreme Soviet deputies, regulations for the Supreme Soviet, a resolution on commissions, regulations on local government, and laws on the Supreme Court and the Procuracy. The enabling legislation provided the specific and changing operating rules for these government bodies.

### ***Constitutional Rights***

Like democratic constitutions, the Soviet Constitution included a series of civic and political rights. Among these were the rights to freedom of speech, press, and assembly and the right to religious belief and worship. In addition, the Constitution provided for freedom of artistic work, protection of the family, inviolability of the person and home, and the right to privacy. In line with the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the regime, the Constitution also granted certain social and economic rights. Among these were the rights





*Panoramic view of Moscow, photographed from Moscow University*  
Courtesy Jimmy Pritchard

to work, rest and leisure, health protection, care in old age and sickness, housing, education, and cultural benefits.

Unlike democratic constitutions, however, the Soviet Constitution placed limitations on political rights. Article 6 effectively eliminated organized opposition to the regime by granting to the CPSU the power to lead and guide society. Article 39 enabled the government to prohibit any activities it considered detrimental by stating that "Enjoyment of the rights and freedoms of citizens must not be to the detriment of the interests of society or the state." Article 59 obliged citizens to obey the laws and comply with the standards of socialist society as determined by the party. The regime did not treat as inalienable those political and socioeconomic rights the Constitution granted to the people.

Citizens enjoyed rights only when the exercise of those rights did not interfere with the interests of socialism, and the CPSU alone had the power and authority to determine policies for the government and society (see Lenin's Conception of the Party, ch. 7). For example, the right to freedom of expression contained in Article 52 could be suspended if the exercise of that freedom failed to be in accord with party policies. Until the era of *glasnost'* (see Glossary), freedom of expression did not entail the right to criticize the regime. The government had the power to ban meetings by un-sanctioned religious groups, and violations of the laws that allowed limited religious expression were severely punished under the republics' criminal codes.

The Constitution also failed to provide political and judicial mechanisms for the protection of rights. Thus, the Constitution lacked explicit guarantees protecting the rights of the people, contained in the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution. In fact, the Supreme Soviet has never introduced amendments specifically designed to protect individual rights. Neither did the people have a higher authority within the government to which to appeal when they believed their rights had been violated. The Supreme Court had no power to ensure that constitutional rights were observed by legislation or were respected by the rest of the government. Although the Soviet Union signed the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Accords—see Glossary), which mandated that internationally recognized human rights be respected in the signatory countries, no authority outside the Soviet Union could ensure citizen rights and freedoms. The government generally has failed to observe the provisions of this act. In the late 1980s, however, realigning constitutional and domestic law with international commitments on human rights was publicly debated.

### ***Role of the Citizen***

Article 59 of the Constitution stated that citizens' exercise of their rights was inseparable from performance of their duties. Articles 60 through 69 defined these duties. Citizens were obliged to work and to observe labor discipline. The legal code labeled evasion of work as "parasitism" and provided severe punishment for this crime. The Constitution also obligated citizens to protect socialist property and oppose corruption. All citizens performed military service as a duty to safeguard and "enhance the power and prestige of the Soviet state." Violation of this duty was a betrayal of the motherland and the gravest of crimes. Finally, the Constitution obligated parents to train their children for socially useful work and to raise them as worthy members of socialist society.

The Constitution and other legislation protected and enforced Soviet citizenship. Legislation on citizenship granted equal rights of citizenship to naturalized citizens as well as to the native born. Laws also specified that citizens could not freely renounce their citizenship. Citizens were required to apply for permission to do so from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, which could reject the application if the applicant had not completed military service, had judicial duties, or was responsible for family dependents. In addition, the Presidium could refuse the application to protect national security. However, the Presidium could revoke citizenship for defamation of the Soviet Union or for acts damaging to national prestige or security.

### ***State Symbols***

The Constitution specified the state flag and the arms of the Soviet Union. The flag had a red field, the traditional color of proletarian revolution. On the flag was a gold hammer and sickle, which represented the workers and the peasants, respectively, and the red star, which symbolized Soviet power, bordered in gold to contrast with the red field. The arms had a hammer and a sickle superimposed on a globe, with rays of the sun radiating from below, surrounded by sheaves of wheat. The rays of the sun represented the dawn of a new world, and the sheaves of wheat symbolized the economic plenty that was to be created in Soviet society. The inscription "Proletarians of all countries, unite!"—from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*—was written on a red banner wound around the sheaves of wheat. The arms and flags of the republics carried the same visual themes, underscoring the unity of all the republics in the federation.

The Constitution specified that the state anthem be selected and

confirmed by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. In 1989 the anthem was the *Anthem of the Soviet Union*, which had been composed under Stalin and contained fulsome praise of the dictator. After Stalin's death, the Presidium removed the offensive lyrics.

## **Central Government**

Soviet political and legal theorists defined their government as a parliamentary system because in principle all power in the government emanated from the Congress of People's Deputies. In addition, according to the Constitution the Supreme Soviet elected both its own leadership and that of the all-union administrative and judicial agencies, which were responsible to it. In fact, the congress was too large to effectively exercise power, and it met only for short periods every year. When in session, the congress ratified legislation already promulgated by the Council of Ministers, the ministries, and the Supreme Soviet or its Presidium, and it discussed domestic and foreign policy. It also set the agenda for activities of the Supreme Soviet.

The lines separating legislative from executive functions were rather blurred. Thus, in addition to administering the government and the economy, the Council of Ministers could promulgate both resolutions that had the force of law and binding administrative orders. (The Supreme Soviet, however, had the ability to repeal such resolutions and orders.) Individual ministries—the chief administrative organs of the government—had the power to make laws in their respective fields. Thus, the legislative authority in this system was highly dispersed. In the late 1980s, some officials criticized law making by organs other than the Supreme Soviet and called for further amendments to the Constitution to give the Supreme Soviet greater authority over law making.

The CPSU effectively exercised control over the government. Leaders of the government were always party members and served on such party bodies as the Politburo and the Central Committee (see Central Party Institutions, ch. 7). In their role as party leaders, government officials participated in the formation of political, social, and economic policies. In addition, these officials were subject to the norms of democratic centralism, which required that they carry out the orders of the CPSU or face party discipline (see Democratic Centralism, ch. 7). Equally important, as part of its *nomenklatura* authority, the party had appointment power for all important positions in the government hierarchy (see Nomenklatura, ch. 7). The party also exercised control through the commissions and committees of the Supreme Soviet, which were supervised by Central Committee departments and commissions

in their respective fields (see Secretariat, ch. 7). Each ministry contained its own primary party organization (PPO), which ensured that the staff of the ministry daily adhered to party policies (see Primary Party Organization, ch. 7). In fact, the party, not the ministerial and legislative system, was the leading political institution in the Soviet Union (see table 28, Appendix A).

## **Administrative Organs**

Article 128 of the Constitution named the Council of Ministers as the “highest executive and administrative body of state authority” in the Soviet Union. Although the members of the council were subject to ratification and change by the Supreme Soviet and the Congress of People’s Deputies, in 1989 they were actually appointed by the party. However, the council was too large to act as an effective decision-making body. The Council of Ministers Presidium, made up of the most influential economic administrators in the government, had the power to act in the name of the full council when it was not in session. The chairman of the full Council of Ministers, the equivalent of a prime minister, acted as head of government and chief economic administrator. In 1989 the chairman of the Council of Ministers, Nikolai I. Ryzhkov, sat on the Politburo.

Below the central institutions stood the ministries, state committees, and other governmental organs, which carried out regime policies in their respective fields subject to strict party control. The ministries managed the economic, social, and political systems.

### ***Council of Ministers***

The Council of Ministers and its agencies carried out the following tasks of government: internal and external security of the state; economic development, management, and administration; and ideological instruction and education. The council enacted the decisions of the party and therefore administered, through its bureaucratic regulatory and management arms, every aspect of Soviet life. As its primary task, however, the council managed the economy.

The Supreme Soviet ratified council membership as submitted by the chairman of the Council of Ministers. However, the actual selection of council ministers was made by the party leadership as part of its *nomenklatura* authority and was only later confirmed by a vote of the Supreme Soviet. Until recently, the Supreme Soviet endorsed such decisions unanimously and without debate. In mid-1989, however, Ryzhkov was forced to withdraw some candidates for ministerial posts because some of the committees of the

Supreme Soviet objected that the candidates were unqualified, thus forcing him to submit alternative candidates.

The Council of Ministers had the power to issue decrees, which carried the same force of law as legislative acts of the Supreme Soviet. The Supreme Soviet or, indirectly, the Congress of People's Deputies, could annul a decree if it found the decree to be in violation of the Constitution or an existing statute (perhaps upon the recommendation of the Constitutional Oversight Committee). Orders of the Council of Ministers on administrative matters technically did not carry the force of law, but they were binding on the ministerial apparatus. Although some decrees were published, most remained secret.

In 1989 the Council of Ministers had more than 100 members, including the ministers, the heads of government bureaus and state committees, and the chairmen of the councils of ministers of the fifteen constituent republics. Soviet scholars maintained that the Council of Ministers met "regularly," but reports in the press indicated that full meetings occurred only quarterly to hear and ratify a plan or a report from the chairman. In reality, the Council of Ministers delegated most of its functions to its Presidium or to the individual ministries.

### *Chairman of the Council of Ministers*

The Constitution placed the chairman of the Council of Ministers at the head of government. As such, the chairman acted as the prime minister and therefore was responsible for enacting party decisions and ensuring that their implementation conformed to the intentions of the party leadership. Three party leaders have served concurrently as the chairman of the Council of Ministers. Lenin chaired the Sovnarkom when he was the de facto head of the party. Stalin, who was the party's first general secretary, became chairman during World War II and remained in that position until his death in 1953. In March 1958, Nikita S. Khrushchev, who had been first secretary since 1953 (the title changed to first secretary after Stalin's death and reverted to general secretary in 1966), took over the position of chairman of the Council of Ministers also. After Khrushchev's ouster in 1964, in order to avoid too much concentration of power, the party established a policy that the positions of chairman of the Council of Ministers and first (general) secretary of the party had to be filled by two different persons.

Because of the heavy involvement of the government in economic administration, chairmen of the Council of Ministers since Khrushchev have been experienced industrial administrators rather than political decision makers. Although the chairman occupied a seat



*Officials leave the Kremlin after a CPSU Central Committee plenum in September 1988. The Council of Ministers and the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet buildings are in the background.*

*Courtesy Jimmy Pritchard*

on the Politburo and thus had a voice in decision making at the highest level, this official was obliged to defer to other leaders in matters not pertaining to the economy. Thus, the chairman of the Council of Ministers had less power than the general secretary and perhaps less power than party secretaries who were members of the Politburo (see Secretariat, ch. 7).

### ***Council of Ministers Presidium***

The Constitution stipulated that the Council of Ministers form a Presidium as the "standing body of the Council of Ministers" to coordinate its work. The Presidium had the power to act on questions and speak for the government when the council was not in session. Apart from a few references in the Soviet literature indicating that the Presidium provided top-level guidance and coordination for the economy, little was known about the Presidium. In the words of American Sovietologist Jerry F. Hough, it was "a most shadowy institution."

Members of the council's Presidium represented the government's major planning and production organizations. Although Soviet sources had differing opinions on its membership, they always pointed to the council's chairman, first deputy chairmen, and

deputy chairmen as members. Deputy chairmen and first deputy chairmen usually served as the head of the State Planning Committee (Gosudarstvennyi planovyi komitet—Gosplan); the chairmen of the state committees for science and technology, construction, and material and technical supply; and the permanent representative to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon—see Appendix B). Deputy chairmen could also act as high-level planners in the major sectors of the economy, known as industrial complexes (see *The Complexes and the Ministries*, ch. 12). These planners served as chairmen of the Council of Ministers' bureaus and commissions for foreign economic relations, the defense industry, machine building, energy, and social development. Some Soviet sources included the minister of finance, the chairman of the Committee of People's Control, and the CPSU general secretary as members of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers. Thus, the membership of the Presidium indicated that it functioned as the "economic bureau" of the full Council of Ministers.

### *Ministerial System*

Ministers were the chief administrative officials of the government. While most ministers managed branches of the economy, others managed affairs of state, such as foreign policy, defense, justice, and finance. Unlike parliamentary systems in which ministers are members of the parliament, Soviet ministers were not necessarily members of the Supreme Soviet and did not have to be elected. Soviet ministers usually rose within a ministry; having begun work in one ministry, they could, however, be appointed to a similar position in another. Thus, by the time the party appointed an official to a ministerial position, that person was fully acquainted with the affairs of the ministry and was well trained in avoiding conflict with the party. Until the late 1980s, ministers enjoyed long tenures, commonly serving for decades and often dying in office.

Two types of ministries made up the ministerial system: all-union and union-republic. All-union ministries oversaw a particular activity for the entire country and were controlled by the all-union party apparatus and the government in Moscow. Republic governments had no corresponding ministry, although all-union ministries had branch offices in the republics. Union-republic ministries had a central ministry in Moscow, which coordinated the work of counterpart ministries in the republic governments. Republic party organizations also oversaw the work of the union-republic ministries in their domain.

The Constitution determined into which category certain ministries fell. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was a union-republic ministry, reflecting the republics' constitutional right to foreign representation. Although the republics had foreign ministries, the central Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow in fact conducted all diplomacy for the Soviet Union (see *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, ch. 10).

All-union ministries were more centralized, thus permitting greater control over vital functions. Union-republic ministries appeared to exercise limited autonomy in nonvital areas. In practice, the central government dominated the union-republic ministries, although in theory each level of government possessed equal authority over its affairs.

Union-republic ministries offered some practical economic advantages. Republic representatives in the union-republic ministries attempted to ensure that the interests of the republics were taken into account in policy formation. In addition, the arrangement permitted the central ministry to set guidelines that the republics could then adapt to their local conditions. The central ministry in Moscow also could delegate some responsibilities to the republic level.

The internal structures of both all-union and union-republic ministries were highly centralized. A central ministry had large functional departments and specialized directorates. Chief directorates carried out the most important specialized functions in larger ministries. Specialized functions included foreign contracts, planning, finance, construction, personnel, and staff services. The first department of any ministry, staffed by personnel from the Committee for State Security (Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti—KGB), controlled security.

State committees and government agencies similarly were categorized as all-union and union-republic organizations. State committees oversaw technical matters that involved many aspects of government, such as standards, inventions and discoveries, labor and social issues, sports, prices, and statistics. Other agencies, such as the news agency TASS (see *Glossary*) and the Academy of Sciences, oversaw affairs under their purview.

Ministries and state committees not only managed the economy, government, and society but also could make laws. Most ministries and state committees issued orders and instructions that were binding only on their organizations. Some ministries, however, could issue orders within a legally specified area of responsibility that were binding on society as a whole. These orders carried the same force of law as acts of the Supreme Soviet. For example, the Ministry of Finance set the rules for any form of foreign exchange.

### ***Party Control of the Ministerial Apparatus***

The ministries and state committees operated without the appearance of party control. Nevertheless, the party ensured its authority over the government through several mechanisms designed to preserve its leading role in society.

Considerable overlap between the memberships of the Council of Ministers and leading party bodies facilitated both policy coordination between the two organizations and party control. The chairman of the Council of Ministers normally occupied a seat on the Politburo, which gave him additional authority to ensure the implementation of his decisions. In 1989 the first deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, Iurii D. Masliukov, was promoted to full-member status on the Central Committee, and both he and deputy chairman Aleksandra P. Biriukova were candidate members of the Politburo. In early 1989, Viktor M. Chebrikov, the head of the KGB, and Eduard A. Shevardnadze, the minister of foreign affairs, were also Politburo members. In addition, most ministers and chairmen of state committees were either full or candidate members of the Central Committee (see Central Committee, ch. 7). Thus, the norms of democratic centralism obliged council members to adhere to party policies.

Within the Council of Ministers and the ministries, the party used its *nomenklatura* authority to place its people in influential positions. *Nomenklatura* refers both to the positions that the Central Committee apparatus of the party has the power to fill and to a list of people qualified to fill them. Approximately one-third of the administrative positions in the council bureaucracy, including the most important ones, were on the *nomenklatura* list. Occupants of these positions well understood that the party could remove them if they failed to adhere to its policies.

Finally, in what is known as dual subordination, the staff of each ministry was required to respond to orders and directions from its primary party organization (PPO), as well as to the ministries' hierarchy. Party members on the staff of the ministry were bound by the norms of democratic centralism to obey the orders of the secretary of the PPO, who represented the CPSU hierarchy in the ministry. The secretary of the PPO ensured that CPSU policies were carried out in the day-to-day activities of the ministries.

### **Congress of People's Deputies**

In 1989 the Congress of People's Deputies stood at the apex of the system of soviets and was the highest legislative organ in the country. Created by amendment to the Constitution in December

1988, the Congress of People's Deputies theoretically represented the united authority of the congresses and soviets in the republics. In addition to its broad duties, it created and monitored all other government bodies having the authority to issue decrees. In 1989 the Congress of People's Deputies, however, was largely a ceremonial forum meeting only a few days a year to ratify and debate party and government decisions and to elect from its own membership the Supreme Soviet to carry out legislative functions between sittings of the congress. Other responsibilities of the Congress of People's Deputies included changing the Constitution, adopting decisions concerning state borders and the federal structure, ratifying government plans, electing the chairman and first deputy chairman of the Supreme Soviet, and electing members of the Constitutional Oversight Committee.

In the elections that took place under the 1988 law on electing deputies to the Congress of People's Deputies, several candidates were allowed to run for the same office for the first time since 1917. Nevertheless, no party except the CPSU was allowed to field candidates, and a large bloc of seats was reserved for CPSU members and members of other officially sanctioned organizations. In the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian republics and to a far lesser degree in the Belorussian Republic, however, popular fronts, which were tantamount to political parties, fielded their own candidates. The regime maintained that these elections demonstrated that the Soviet people could freely choose their own government.

The Congress of People's Deputies that was elected in March through May 1989 consisted of 2,250 deputies—1,500 from the electoral districts and national-territorial electoral districts and 750 from officially sanctioned organizations, including the CPSU. In all, 5,074 individuals were registered as candidates. A main election was held in which 89.8 percent of the eligible voters, or 172.8 million people, participated. Following the main election, runoff elections were held in districts in which a candidate failed to obtain a majority of the votes cast in the main election. Runoff elections took place in 76 out of 1,500 electoral districts. Repeat elections were also held in 198 electoral districts where less than one-half of the eligible voters in the district voted. Official organizations also held elections in which 84.2 percent of the eligible voters, or 162 million people, participated. Five repeat elections were for organizations. Of the 2,250 deputies elected, 8.1 percent were newly elected to the legislature.

The CPSU has used several means to exercise control over the activities of the legislative system. Since 1964 the chairman of the Supreme Soviet's Presidium has been a member of the Politburo,

and other members of the Presidium have sat on the party's Central Committee. In addition, since 1977 CPSU general secretaries have usually held the post of chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, although Mikhail S. Gorbachev, at first, did not hold this post. Also, the party has had a large role in determining which of the elected deputies would serve as deputies in the Supreme Soviet. As part of their own *nomenklatura* authority, local party organizations have selected candidates to run in the elections. The commissions and committees, which had some power to oversee government policy, have accepted direction from the CPSU's Central Committee departments and their chairmen, and a large proportion of their memberships has consisted of CPSU members. In the Congress of People's Deputies elected in 1989, about 87 percent, or 1,957 deputies, were members or candidate members of the CPSU.

### ***Elections to the Congress of People's Deputies***

In 1989 three categories of deputies were selected to the Congress of People's Deputies: those representing the CPSU and officially recognized organizations; those representing the population as divided into residential electoral districts; and those representing the population as divided into national territories. In 1989 one-third (750) of the deputies were elected in each category. Quotas for deputies were assigned to the various official organizations, electoral districts, and national-territorial electoral districts. The largest organizational quotas were reserved for the CPSU, trade unions, collective farms (see Glossary), Komsomol (see Glossary), veterans, retired workers, and the Committee of Soviet Women. Minor but officially sanctioned groups such as stamp collectors, cinema fans, book lovers, and musicians were also represented. Because individual voters belonged to several different constituencies, they could vote in elections for several deputies.

In principle, voters in nationwide elections had the freedom to vote for the party-endorsed candidate or for other candidates on the ballot (if any), to write in the name of another candidate, or to refrain from voting. In the early 1989 elections, some of the candidates officially endorsed by the CPSU were rejected by the voters, including high-level party officials, such as Iurii Solov'ev, the party secretary of Leningrad.

The regime considered voting a duty rather than a right. Citizens age eighteen and older voted in soviet elections, and those age twenty-one and older were eligible to be elected to the Congress of People's Deputies. Persons holding governmental posts, however, could not be elected deputy to the soviet that appointed them. Citizens



*Building housing the Supreme Soviet and the Council of Ministers  
of the Tadzhik Republic in Dushanbe*  
*Building housing the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet  
of the Kirgiz Republic in Frunze*  
*Courtesy Jimmy Pritchard*

had the right to participate in election campaigns and the right to campaign for any candidate.

### ***Deputies and Citizen Involvement***

Deputies to the Congress of People's Deputies represented a cross section of the various economic and professional groups in the population. According to the official Credentials Commission report, in terms of occupation 24.8 percent of the deputies to the congress were "workers in industry, construction, transport, or communications," 18.9 percent were in agriculture, and of both these groups 23.7 percent were ordinary workers and peasants. Managers in industry and agriculture made up 6.8 percent and 8.5 percent of the deputies, respectively. Party secretaries at various levels made up 10.5 percent of the deputies. Military officers made up 3.6 percent of the deputies. In terms of age, 88.6 percent were under age sixty, while 8.3 percent were under age thirty. Regarding level of education, 75.7 percent possessed complete or incomplete higher education, and 6.2 percent were full or corresponding members of the central or republic academies of sciences. Nevertheless, selection procedures underrepresented some segments of society. Only 15.6 percent of the delegates were women, and just seven of the deputies (0.3 percent) were religious leaders.

### **Supreme Soviet**

The Supreme Soviet served as the highest organ of state power between sittings of the Congress of People's Deputies. The Supreme Soviet formally appointed the chairman of the Council of Ministers, ratified or rejected his candidates for ministerial posts and supervised their work, and adopted economic plans and budgets and reported on their implementation. Through its chairman, the Supreme Soviet represented the country in formal diplomacy. It also had the authority to appoint the Defense Council, confer military and diplomatic ranks, declare war, ratify treaties, and repeal acts of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, and the Council of Ministers.

The Supreme Soviet has traditionally delegated its powers to the government bodies it has elected and nominally supervised. The Supreme Soviet reserved the right to review and formally approve their actions, and in the past it always gave this approval. Actions of other government bodies elected by the Supreme Soviet became law with force equal to the Supreme Soviet's own decisions (see *Administrative Organs*, this ch.). The commissions and committees have played a minor role in ensuring that the language of legislation was uniform. In 1989 they took an active role in judging

the qualifications of candidates for ministerial bodies and in questioning governmental operations.

### *Organs of the Supreme Soviet*

The Supreme Soviet has functioned with the help of several secondary organs. The Presidium has acted as the steering committee of the Supreme Soviet while it was in session. In 1989 both chambers of the Supreme Soviet—the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities—met either individually or jointly in sessions planned to last six to eight months. Each chamber had commissions and committees that prepared legislation for passage, oversaw its implementation, and monitored the activities of other governmental bodies. In 1989 the Supreme Soviet also had fourteen joint committees, and each chamber had four commissions.

### *Presidium*

In 1989 the Presidium, as designated by the Constitution, had forty-two members. The Presidium was made up of a chairman, a first vice chairman, fifteen vice chairmen (who represented the supreme soviets of the fifteen republics), the chairmen of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities, the chairman of the Committee of People's Control, and the twenty-two chairmen of the commissions and committees of the Supreme Soviet. Only a few members regularly resided in Moscow, where the Presidium has always met. Before 1989 the Presidium membership served a symbolic function through the inclusion of twenty-one at-large members, made up of factory workers, peasants, scientists, professionals, and leaders of professional organizations. Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, was the most prominent of these at-large members. The purpose of this broadened membership was to show that all strata of society participated in the state's leading organ. In addition, some high-level party figures who were not members of the government sat on the Presidium as a symbol of CPSU authority in the legislature. For instance, General Secretary Gorbachev sat on the Presidium as an at-large member from 1985 to 1988.

Prior to 1989, the Presidium was the leading legislative organ between sessions of the Supreme Soviet, which met only a few days a year and held formal sessions only once every two months. Announcements of Presidium decrees, however, appeared in the press nearly every day, which indicated that the Presidium's staff worked full time. Presidium decrees, issued over the signatures of the chairman and the secretary, merely certified and legitimated decisions made by the CPSU. Nevertheless, decrees issued in the Presidium's

name demonstrated wide-ranging powers to supervise the government bureaucracy.

The 1988 amendments and additions to the Constitution reduced the powers of the Presidium by making it more of an agenda-setting and administrative body (see The 1977 Constitution, this ch.). According to Article 119 of the Constitution, the Presidium was authorized to convene sessions of the Supreme Soviet and organize their preparation, coordinate the activities of the commissions and committees of the Supreme Soviet, oversee conformity of all-union and republic laws with the Constitution, confer military and diplomatic ranks, appoint and recall diplomats, issue decrees and adopt resolutions, and declare war or mobilize troops in between sessions of the Supreme Soviet, among other duties.

### ***Chairman***

The office of chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet before 1989 was little more than a ceremonial and diplomatic convenience. The chairman had the formal authority to sign treaties and to receive the credentials of diplomatic representatives. The power of the person occupying the office stemmed from other positions that person may have held. In the past, CPSU general secretaries who also served as chairmen of the Presidium have given priority to their party duties rather than to the ceremonial duties of the chairmanship. Taking this consideration into account, the 1977 Constitution provided for the office of first deputy chairman to relieve the chairman of most ceremonial duties. When the chairmanship has been vacant, the first deputy chairman has acted in his place, as Vasilii Kuznetsov did after Brezhnev's death and before Iurii V. Andropov assumed the chairmanship. Gorbachev assumed the office of chairman in October 1988. The 1988 amendments and additions to the Constitution retained the post of first deputy chairman in recognition of its usefulness in relieving the legislative burden on the person occupying the positions of general secretary of the party and chairman of the Supreme Soviet.

The 1988 amendments and additions to the Constitution substantially altered the status of the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet by making him also chairman of the Supreme Soviet and having him elected by the Congress of People's Deputies. By designating a formal chairman of the Supreme Soviet, the Constitution changed the status of the head of state from a collective Presidium to a single chairman. Also, the Constitution for the first time listed responsibilities of the chairman of the Supreme Soviet. These responsibilities included the exercise of leadership over the

preparation of agendas of the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet, the signing of laws and treaties, the negotiation of treaties, the submission of reports on domestic and foreign policy, and the submission of candidates for first deputy chairman of the Supreme Soviet, members of the Constitutional Oversight Committee, chairman of the Council of Ministers, and other candidates for leading government posts. The Constitution also stipulated that the chairman of the Supreme Soviet head the Defense Council, a body that determined broad military policy and funding.

### *Soviet of the Union and Soviet of Nationalities*

The two chambers that made up the Supreme Soviet—the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities—were selected from among the membership of the Congress of People's Deputies at the beginning of a convocation by a general vote of the deputies. The members of the Soviet of Nationalities were selected by each republic's delegation to the congress (in actuality by the republic's party officials) on the basis of eleven deputies from each union republic, four deputies from each autonomous republic (see Glossary), two deputies from each autonomous oblast (see Glossary), and one deputy from each autonomous *okrug* (see Glossary). The members of the Soviet of the Union were selected on the basis of the population of the union republics and regions. One-fifth of the membership of each chamber was changed each year from the pool of congress deputies.

The two-chamber system has attempted to balance the interests of the country as a whole with those of its constituent nationalities. The Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities could meet either separately or jointly. Officials elected from each chamber could preside over the sessions. Either chamber could propose legislation. Legislation passed by majorities in each chamber did not need to be referred to joint session. If the two chambers met in joint session, the chairman of the Supreme Soviet presided. If the chairman was absent, the first deputy chairman presided. Disagreements between the two chambers, if they occurred, could be referred to a conciliation commission, then back to the chambers sitting in joint session. If still unresolved, the question would be decided by the Congress of People's Deputies.

The two chambers of the Supreme Soviet have exercised equal powers and have shared equal status, although they theoretically served different purposes. The Soviet of the Union, established in 1924, grew out of the system of workers' councils at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution (see Revolutions and Civil War, ch. 2). It has been the primary venue for discussion of issues on socioeconomic

development of the country as a whole, the rights and duties of citizens, foreign policy, defense, and state security. The Soviet of Nationalities, also established in 1924, ostensibly represented the interests of the national minorities in the central government. Because of its limited power, however, its significance remained more symbolic than real. Its sphere of authority included only issues of national and ethnic rights and interethnic relations. Nevertheless, the regime has traditionally pointed to the existence of this body as proof that the country's nationalities had an equal voice in decision making and policy formation.

### *Sessions of the Supreme Soviet*

Until 1989 the Supreme Soviet was convoked for five-year terms but met in session only for a few days twice a year. Thus, each five-year convocation had ten or more sessions. The Supreme Soviet elected to a five-year term in early 1989 was the twelfth convocation. According to the 1988 amendments and additions to the Constitution, the Supreme Soviet was slated to meet daily, holding two sessions a year, with each lasting three to four months.

Councils of elder members, meeting briefly before sessions, have traditionally helped organize the meetings of both chambers. The staff of the Presidium has assisted in the preparatory paperwork. At the twelfth convocation in 1989, the two councils of elders met in a joint session chaired by Gorbachev to discuss procedures for opening the session, the leadership of the chambers, the agendas, and the composition and functions of commissions and committees. The councils have scheduled meetings of the two chambers in separate session—one after the other—in the same semicircular amphitheater of the Presidium building in the Kremlin, although joint sessions of both chambers have taken place in the Great Hall of the Palace of Soviets. The oldest deputy has opened the sessions. The two chambers then have elected chairmen and two vice chairmen on the recommendations of the councils of elders. The chairmen have set speaker lists and ensured the observance of the established schedule. Until the next session, when they faced another election, the chairmen of the two chambers worked with the Presidium and the chairman of the Supreme Soviet.

The sessions have followed a standard sequence of events. The Supreme Soviet first approved changes in the Council of Ministers and changes in its own membership. It then heard regular reports on the actions taken by the Council of Ministers and by its own Presidium since the last session. Debate and approval of these actions followed. The two regular sessions of the Supreme Soviet in the spring and fall have served different purposes. The spring

session traditionally has heard reports from government bodies and its own commissions. It then has passed legislation based on these reports. The second session has approved the budget for the following year. The fall sessions have also ratified the annual and five-year economic plans of the government.

### ***Commissions and Committees***

Commissions and committees, each made up of some thirty to fifty members, have been important because they have prepared and proposed legislation for formal approval by the Supreme Soviet and monitored activities of ministries and other government bodies. Each chamber of the Supreme Soviet had fourteen committees, which had jointly shared functions, and four commissions, which had unique functions. In 1989 the commissions and committees were tasked by the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet with examining myriad issues, among them ethnic strife, economic autonomy for the republics, the draft economic plan and budget, efficiency in agriculture, social policy, legal reform, and the conformity of various laws to the Constitution. The commissions and committees also evaluated decrees issued by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet that had been rejected by the Supreme Soviet and sent to the commissions and committees for reworking.

In the 1984-89 convocation of the Supreme Soviet, 1,200 deputies served on the commissions (as the committees were called at that time), and 800 worked on the draft economic plan and the draft budget for the following year. In the 1989-94 convocation, 320 deputies served on the commissions and 616 served on the committees. About one-half of the deputies serving on the commissions and committees of the Supreme Soviet were deputies to the Congress of People's Deputies but were not members of the Supreme Soviet. One-fifth of their membership has usually been replaced each year by other deputies of the Supreme Soviet or the Congress of People's Deputies.

In making assignments to commissions and committees, the preferences and expertise of the deputies were taken into account; deputies have included party leaders, scientists, educators, agricultural specialists, and foreign policy experts. This variegated membership not only has obtained contributions of experts on legislation but also has permitted the party to communicate its policies to important segments of society. In 1989 the four commissions in each chamber that had functions unique to the chamber included, among others, planning, budgeting, and finance; labor, prices, and social policy; transportation, communications, and information sciences;

and nationalities policy and interethnic relations. The fourteen committees in each chamber that had jointly shared functions covered such areas as foreign affairs, ecology, women and family, veterans and invalids, youth, *glasnost'*, economic reform, agronomy, and construction, among others. In addition to drafting legislation, the commissions and committees monitored the activities of the ministries and other government bodies. Their oversight of the government included evaluating candidates for ministerial posts and questioning ministerial personnel while preparing legislation. In 1989 the committees of the Supreme Soviet rejected several candidates nominated by the chairman of the Council of Ministers, Ryzhkov, forcing him to submit other, more qualified candidates for the posts. Candidates approved by the committees were subject to questioning by deputies on the floor of the Supreme Soviet. To monitor compliance with existing law, the commissions and committees heard ministerial reports and requested materials and documents from the ministries and other government bodies. Government bodies were required to consider the recommendations on government operations of the commissions or committees and to report implementation measures to them.

Prior to 1989, the commissions of the Supreme Soviet had been instruments by which the CPSU controlled legislation and supervised the Supreme Soviet and the ministries. In 1989 the CPSU remained an important influence over the work of the commissions and committees because the vast majority of members were party members, and influential party leaders either chaired the commissions and committees or served as members. The departments of the party's Secretariat watched over commissions and committees that monitored work under their purview (see Secretariat, ch. 7). Although by law government officials were not permitted to serve on the commissions and committees, this ban did not apply to party officials, so that the membership on the commissions and committees was able to overlap with that of the party's departments. Through this overlap, party officials were thus able to ensure that the Supreme Soviet adhered to party decisions. For example, prior to 1989 the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission (present-day Foreign Affairs Committee) of the Soviet of the Union was usually the second-ranking member of the Politburo. The chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Soviet of Nationalities was normally the head of the CPSU International Department. The deputy chairmen and secretaries of the two commissions were also deputy heads of the party's International Department or the Liaison with Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries Department. Party leaders used these roles to



*Government House, Lenin Square, Baku, Azerbaydzhani Republic*  
Courtesy Jimmy Pritchard

conduct diplomacy on behalf of the Soviet Union. Thus, during his 1984 visit to Britain, Gorbachev acted in his capacity as chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Soviet of the Union. As of 1989, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee (formerly the Foreign Affairs Commission) of the Soviet of the Union was no longer a major party figure but was still a party official.

#### *Legislative Process*

The legislative process has worked in a very formalized manner. For example, the Ministry of Finance, Gosplan, and other institutions submitted economic planning documents to the Soviet of the Union's Planning, Budgeting, and Finance Commission and to other Supreme Soviet commissions and committees and to republic representatives. Deputies of the various commissions and committees of both chambers and other individuals met to review the documents, hear expert testimony, make amendments, and submit the economic plan to the Supreme Soviet. The minister of finance and the chairman of the Council of Ministers submitted their own reports as well.

The Supreme Soviet, after debate, traditionally disposed of the plan with a resolution and a law. The resolution noted reports on the plan delivered by the chairman of Gosplan and the minister

of finance. It evaluated the work of the Council of Ministers in fulfilling the previous year's plan and instructed the Council of Ministers to examine proposals prepared by the commissions and committees and those comments made by deputies in the debate and then to take appropriate action. The Law of the Plan formally ratified the plan, taking into account the work of the commissions and committees and setting out in detail budget and plan targets for the following year.

### ***Party Controls***

The CPSU has exercised control over the activities of the Supreme Soviet in a variety of ways. Most important has been the extent of party membership among the delegates. In the first eleven convocations of the Supreme Soviet, party membership averaged about 75 percent. Another 15 percent of the delegates were members of the Komsomol. At the twelfth convocation beginning in 1989, party membership in the Congress of People's Deputies amounted to 87 percent, and Komsomol membership amounted to 5.9 percent. The party caucus, which received its instructions directly from the CPSU's central apparatus, was led by party members and controlled legislative procedures.

Leadership positions in the Supreme Soviet were under the *nomenklatura* of the Politburo. Thus, members of the Presidium, all but one of whom were usually party members, abided by the decisions of the party leadership or risked losing their positions. Members of the Presidium, as well as rank-and-file party members who were elected delegates, were subject to the norms of democratic centralism.

The party controlled the selection process for ordinary deputies as well. Local party organs supervised nominations and elections. Party officials carefully selected delegates either to ensure the selection of party leaders and party stalwarts in the arts, literature, the military, and the scientific and scholarly communities, or to reward rank-and-file members for long years of service to the party and government. In the event that delegates proved uncompliant, the Constitution granted the party the power to initiate a recall election. Recalls have been rare, however. Out of 7,500 deputies elected between 1960 and 1985, only 12 have been recalled, mainly for serious personal failings.

### **Control Organs**

The term *control* (*kontrol'*) referred to a system of government and public monitoring of every sphere of production, trade, and administration. Through the government's control organs, the party

ensured that the government and society functioned in compliance with the interests of socialism. The Supreme Soviet nominally formed and directed the three kinds of control organs: the court system, the Procuracy, and the Committee of People's Control. These control organs administered a system of law that derived from the Russian Empire, whose system of law was in turn based on Roman law.

### ***Court System***

Article 151 of the Constitution and the Law on the Supreme Court specified the composition of the Supreme Court but assigned it few duties and little power. The Supreme Court lacked the authority to determine the constitutionality of legislation, to strike down laws, or to interpret the law. Unlike the United States Supreme Court, the Soviet court did not have the power to establish norms of law. The Supreme Court and the lower courts only applied legal principles established by the Constitution or interpreted by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

The Supreme Court was at the apex of a pyramid of lower courts. Cases came to the Supreme Court on appeal from these lower courts. The lowest-level court, called the people's court (see Glossary), was presided over by a professional, elected judge and two people's assessors (lay judges) who were also elected. Provincial soviets and republic supreme soviets elected judges between the district level and the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court also has created a separate series of military tribunals. The Supreme Soviet supervised the application of the law in all these courts to ensure uniform standards.

### ***Procuracy***

The Procuracy (Prokuratura) functioned like a cross between a police investigative bureau and a public prosecutor's office. It investigated crimes, brought criminals to trial, and prosecuted them. The Procuracy also supervised courts and penal facilities within its jurisdiction (see The Procuracy, ch. 19).

The Supreme Soviet appointed the procurator general of the Soviet Union for a five-year term. Like other leading positions in the Soviet government, the position of the procurator general was on the *nomenklatura* of the central party apparatus. In turn, the procurator general appointed each officer of the Procuracy, known as a procurator (see Glossary), who served at the republic, provincial, district, or city level. Procurators at all levels theoretically answered to the Supreme Soviet for their actions. Moreover, they derived authority from the procurator general and thus exercised

their authority independent of any regional or local government body.

The Procuracy, as well as the Supreme Court, ensured the strict and uniform observance of law by all government bodies, enterprises (see Glossary), and public institutions. The Procuracy also reviewed all court decisions in both civil and criminal cases. A procurator could appeal decisions considered flawed to higher courts. The Procuracy was therefore responsible for ensuring the uniform application of law in the courts.

The Procuracy supervised investigations conducted by other government agencies. A procurator could file protests in the court system when evidence indicated an agency acted illegally. In theory, these rights of supervision extended to the KGB and other security agencies. In practice, however, the KGB often operated outside the law.

### *Committees of People's Control*

The 1979 Law on People's Control established the committees of people's control in each republic under the supervision of the central Committee of People's Control. These committees had the authority to audit government and economic administration records. Officials found guilty of illegalities could be publicly reprimanded, fined for damages, or referred to the procurator for prosecution. In the late 1980s, the committees of people's control had been an invaluable instrument in Gorbachev's efforts at reform and restructuring.

The committees of people's control extended throughout the Soviet Union. In 1989, of the more than 10 million citizens who served on these organs, 95 percent were volunteers. General meetings of work collectives at every enterprise and office elected the committees for tenures of two and one-half years. The chairman of the Committee of People's Control and a professional staff served for five years. The chairman sat on the Council of Ministers (see Administrative Organs, this ch.).

### *Law*

Lacking a common-law tradition, Soviet law did not provide for an adversary system in which the plaintiff and the defendant argued before a neutral judge. Court proceedings included a judge, two people's assessors, a procurator, and a defense attorney and provided for free participation by the judge in the trial. The same courts heard both civil and criminal cases. Although most cases were open to the public, closed hearings were legal if the government deemed it necessary. Judges kept legal technicalities to a

minimum because the court's stated purpose was to find the truth of a case rather than to protect legal rights.

Other aspects of Soviet law more closely resembled the Anglo-Saxon system. In theory, all citizens were equal before the law. Defendants could appeal convictions to higher courts if they believed the sentence was too harsh. Yet, the procurator could also appeal if the sentence was considered too lenient. The law also guaranteed defendants legal representation and the right to trial in their native language or to the use of an interpreter.

## **Territorial Administration**

The central government in Moscow and the governments of the fifteen republics—consisting of fourteen soviet socialist republics (SSR—see Glossary) and the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic—were joined in a theoretically voluntary union. The republic constitutions and the Soviet Constitution established the rules of the federal system.

The Constitution specified the relationship of the central government to the republics. Article 73 of the Constitution limited the central government to the administration of matters requiring central leadership of the country as a whole: national and internal security and the economy. In entering the union, the republics ceded these responsibilities to the central government bodies.

The governmental system below the central level appeared complicated because it was organized according to the two often contradictory principles of geography and nationality. The administrative subdivisions of a republic, oblast (roughly equivalent to a province), and *raion* (district) were based primarily on geography. The larger republics, such as the Russian and Ukrainian republics, were divided into oblasts. But smaller republics (the Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian, Armenian, and Moldavian republics) did not have an oblast administration between the republic and the district levels. In addition, six large, thinly populated regions in the Russian Republic have been designated by the term *krai*. A *krai* could contain an autonomous oblast or an autonomous *okrug* inhabited by a national minority. About 300 large cities and approximately 3,000 rural and urban districts (*raions*) made up the next lowest government level. In turn, the large cities were divided into urban districts, or *gorodskie raions*. Approximately 40,000 village centers made up the rural districts.

The Russian Republic and some of the other republics also contained administrative subdivisions with boundaries drawn according to nationality or language. The three kinds of such subdivisions

included twenty autonomous republics, eight autonomous oblasts, and ten autonomous *okruga*.

### **Republic Level**

In theory, the fifteen republics entered into a free and voluntary union of sovereign states when they joined the Soviet Union. The Constitution granted the republics the right to secede; nonetheless, as of 1988 the republics had exercised very little sovereignty. In 1989, however, the Lithuanian, Estonian, Moldavian, and several other republics sought greater national autonomy (see *Manifestations of National Assertiveness*, ch. 4).

### **Legal Status**

Long-standing practice has established three nonconstitutional requirements for republic status. First, as stated by Stalin in supervising the writing of the 1936 constitution, the republics had to border on territory outside the Soviet Union, enabling them to exercise their theoretical right to secede. All republics met this requirement. Second, the national minority that gave its name to the republic was supposed to make up a majority of its population and to number more than 1 million people. In 1989 the Kazakhs, however, did not constitute a majority of the Kazakh Republic's population, constituting about 40 percent of the republic's population of 16.5 million people. Third, republics were supposed to have the potential to be economically viable states, should they secede from the union.

Over the course of Soviet history, the Supreme Soviet has created new union republics within the territory of the Soviet Union. In 1922 the Soviet Union comprised four republics: the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, the Ukrainian Republic, the Belorussian Republic, and the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. The Soviet government elevated Turkmenia (also known as Turkmenistan) and Uzbekistan to republic status in 1924, and Tadzhikistan split from the Uzbek Republic in 1929 to form a separate republic. Kazakhstan and Kirgizia became republics in 1936. (Turkmenia, Uzbekistan, Kirgizia, and Kazakhstan had been part of the Russian Republic.) In 1936 the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic split into the Armenian, Azerbaijdzhan, and Georgian republics.

As the Soviet Union gained territory, the Supreme Soviet created new republics. Territory taken from Finland was joined in March 1940 with the Karelian Autonomous Republic to form the Karelo-Finnish Republic. (In 1956 this republic, which had never had a majority of the nationality whose name it bore, was demoted to

*Building housing the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian Republic, Tallin.  
The flag on the adjacent tower is the national flag of Estonia.  
Courtesy Jonathan Tetzlaff*



the status of an autonomous republic and was renamed the Karelian Autonomous Republic.) Moreover, in 1940 Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were incorporated into the Soviet Union as republics. Finally, in 1940 Bessarabia, taken from Romania, was joined with the Romanian-speaking portion of the Moldavian Autonomous Republic in the Ukrainian Republic to form the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic.

### ***Government***

The union republics and the autonomous republics shared the same basic principles of government. As in the central government, in theory the republic congresses of people's deputies exercised authority. In practice, the congresses delegated their power to the presidiums of their supreme soviets and to the republic councils of ministers, and the first secretary of the republic party organization set policy for the republic as a whole (see Republic Party Organization, ch. 7). Between supreme soviet sessions, the presidium and its chairman exercised the legislative powers of the republic. By custom, the chairman was a member of the republic's dominant nationality, a practice that highlighted the theoretical sovereignty of the republics and the influence of their dominant nationality on policy making.

The council of ministers administered the government of the republic. The chairman of the council headed the republic but

deferred in all matters to the first secretary of the republic's party organization. The council of ministers included union-republic ministries and republic ministries (see Administrative Organs, this ch.). The latter, which had no counterpart in the central government, administered local public services and light industry. Both kinds of ministries functioned under dual subordination: they were responsible to the central party organization and government and to the republic's party organization and government.

## **Provincial and District Levels**

Below the union-republic level of territorial administration, subdivisions were complex, varied with each republic, and included the following categories: autonomous oblast, autonomous *okrug*, autonomous republic, *krai*, oblast, and *raion*. Only the Russian Republic had all categories of subdivision. Western specialists often termed the administrations of the autonomous subdivisions, *kraia*, and oblasts generically as provincial and that of the *raion* as district. Provincial and district governments shared the same structure. For example, oblast and district soviets—single chambers elected for two and one-half years—exercised all legislative authority. These soviets met up to four times a year for one-day sessions. Between sessions, each soviet delegated its authority to an executive committee (*ispolnitel'nyi komitet*—*ispolkom*), which combined the functions of a council of ministers and a presidium. *Ispolkom* chairmen were the chief executives in the oblast and in the district. These officials normally sat on the party bureaus at these respective hierarchical levels (see Oblast-Level Organization; District- and City-Level Organization, ch. 7).

The *ispolkom* lacked decision-making authority. Although members of the *ispolkom* headed departments that managed oblast and district services such as education, health, and culture, the central government controlled the more important tasks of the administration of justice, the budget, and economic planning and heavy industry. In addition, a substantial number of other social services were controlled by industrial enterprises and were thus beyond the control of local governments. Finally, the party first secretaries exercised power at both the oblast and the district levels. These officials, not the *ispolkom* chairmen, were obliged to answer to the party for the economic performance of their domain of authority.

The approximately 52,500 soviets at the provincial and urban and rural district levels had little power. These soviets, however, were important as vehicles for large-scale citizen participation in the government. The size of these soviets ranged from 200 deputies in rural areas to more than 1,000 in large cities. Thus, more than

2.3 million people served on local soviets at any one time, and, given the high turnover rate, more than 5 million citizens served on the local soviets each decade.

Although sessions of the full soviets at the provincial and district levels were strictly ceremonial, their commissions had some influence. The constituencies of these commissions were small, enabling them to respond to the needs of the people. Practical expertise often determined assignment to these commissions. For example, a teacher could serve on an education commission. Deputies served as channels for criticism and suggestions from constituents, and the deputies' expertise could qualify them as problem solvers on issues that confronted the commission.

## **Elections**

In theory, citizens selected the candidates for election to local soviets. In practice, at least before the June 1987 elections, these candidates had been selected by local CPSU, Komsomol, and trade union officials under the guidance of the district (*raion*) party organization. Elections took place after six weeks of campaigning, and the candidates, always unopposed until 1987, had usually received more than 99 percent of the vote.

Despite the party's historic control over local elections—from the nomination of candidates to their unopposed elections—the citizens used the elections to make public their concerns. They sometimes used the furnished paper ballots to write requests for particular public services. For example, the 1985 elections to an Omsk soviet included instructions to move the airfield farther from the city center, construct a new music center, and build parking facilities for invalids. Subsequently, the Omsk soviet took steps to provide these services, all of which had the approval of the relevant party authorities. Thus, citizen demands that coincided with the interests of the party apparatus have been met through election mandates.

In June 1987, under Moscow's guidance, multicandidate local elections took place experimentally in less than 5 percent of the districts. Presented with a paper ballot listing more candidates than positions, voters indicated their choices by crossing off enough names so that the number of candidates matched the number of positions. Although generally opposed by local administrators, who could no longer assume automatic election, this reform found strong support among the general public. In early 1989, steps to limit the power of official organizations over the nominating process also came under discussion.

Nevertheless, the outcome of efforts to democratize the local election process remained far from certain in 1989. On the one hand, public anger over the autocratic and sometimes arbitrary styles of local leaders, their perceived incompetence, and their inability to provide needed goods and services forced some reforms. On the other hand, opposition by government and party bureaucrats, combined with the lack of a political culture—that is, experience in self-government—obstructed and diluted reforms of the government's structure and functions, as advocated by Gorbachev in the late 1980s.

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Several general works on Soviet politics contain much useful information on the government. Among these works are Darrell P. Hammer's *The USSR: The Politics of Oligarchy* and Jerry F. Hough and Merle Fainsod's *How the Soviet Union Is Governed*. Hough and Fainsod devote special attention to the relationship between the party and the government. Vadim Medish's *The Soviet Union* is a good reference work on the terminology of government. Other works contain more specialized information. Julian Towster's *Political Power in the USSR* provides material on the first three Soviet constitutions. Boris Toporin's *The New Constitution of the USSR* is widely viewed as one of the best English-language books available on the 1977 Constitution. Lev Tolkunov's *How the Supreme Soviet Functions* covers the legislature, as well as other organs of the central government, from a Soviet perspective. Everett M. Jacobs's *Soviet Local Government and Politics* is an invaluable source for this little-studied aspect of Soviet government. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

## Chapter 9. Mass Media and the Arts



*Images from the media and the arts: ballet, television  
broadcasting, and the press*

SINCE THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION of 1917, the leadership of the Soviet Union has used the mass media and the arts to assist in its efforts at changing and regulating society. To propagate values encouraging the construction and stabilization of the new regime, Vladimir I. Lenin, the Bolshevik (see Glossary) leader, centralized political control over the mass media and the primary forms of artistic expression. He drew upon nineteenth-century Russian radical views that advocated politicizing literature and challenging tsarist government policy through artistic protest. Lenin's successors manipulated the mass media and the arts in ways that preserved and strengthened the regime and the party's supremacy.

Leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) believed that strict control over mass media and the arts was essential for governing the country. "Socialist realism"—an aesthetic formula calling for the portrayal of Soviet society in a positive light to inspire its constant improvement along the lines of Marxist-Leninist ideology—was implemented under Joseph V. Stalin. The regime required the media, literature, and the arts to adhere to this formula. A vast bureaucracy, which included party and government censorship organs and official political, military, economic, and social unions and associations, together with self-censorship by writers and artists, ensured a thorough and systematic review of all information reaching the public. Under the leadership of general secretary of the CPSU Mikhail S. Gorbachev, however, Soviet mass media and the arts in the late 1980s were experiencing a loosening of the controls governing the dissemination of information. Nevertheless, the principle of party and government control over newspapers, journals, radio, television, and literature, which helped to ensure the regime's stability, remained firmly intact.

The technological revolution in the 1970s and 1980s, however, hindered rather than helped the regime's control of mass media and the arts. New technology disrupted party and government domination of mass media and the arts and enabled the population to gain greater access to unsanctioned, globally available information. But the regime needed to employ the same technological advances to maintain its influence and power. The mass media linked the leadership to the population, and the socialist (see Glossary) system required politicized media to endure. The regime's attempt to use this new technology while regulating the global flow of information

to Soviet citizens presented one of the most difficult challenges to the leadership, particularly in light of Gorbachev's campaigns for public discussion, democratization, and societal restructuring.

In the late 1980s, newspapers, journals, magazines, radio, television, films, literature, and music espoused poignant, sensitive, and often painful themes that had previously been taboo. The party deemed greater tolerance for criticism of the regime essential in order to placate the intelligentsia and encourage it to support efforts for change. Indeed, the censors eased their restrictions to the point where, in the late 1980s, penetrating historical analyses critical of previous Soviet leaders (including Lenin) and stories about the rehabilitation (see Glossary) of banned writers and artists filled the pages of newspapers, magazines, and journals. Previously proscribed information also appeared in television and radio broadcasts and in film and stage performances. Relaxation of restrictions was also apparent in classical music, jazz, rock and roll, and the plastic arts.

## **Politicization of the Mass Media and the Arts**

The CPSU used the mass media and the arts to enhance its control over society. The justification for such controls was developed by nineteenth-century Russian revolutionary writers who sought to transform Russia through the politicization of literature. Literature and literary criticism were to provide means to challenge tsarist authority and awaken the political consciousness of the population. Specifically, radical writers and artists used "critical realism" (the critical assessment of society) in literature, theater, music, and other forms of creative expression to denounce the authoritarian system. Later, the early Soviet government integrated "critical realism" into its policies to serve as a foundation for the politicization of the media and literary worlds in the early Soviet government.

When Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders governed the country, however, they employed the concept of critical realism to exercise political control over culture rather than to inspire writers and artists to question Bolshevik rule. In its early years, the government established political guidelines for media and the arts. In the late 1920s, the regime determined that its enforcement of stringent publication criteria would be executed by an organization formed by the government. The regime chose to use literature as its model for politicization of the media and the arts and in 1932 formed the Union of Writers to enforce the doctrine of socialist realism over all writing. All modes of creative thought and artistic expression required approval by the regime's authoritative bodies, rigidly structured after the Union of Writers, for every kind of

mass media and form of art. Under Stalin's leadership, socialist realism dictated the content and form to which writers and artists had to adhere. Since Stalin's death in 1953, successive regimes had relaxed the restrictions of socialist realism. In the period after Leonid I. Brezhnev, hitherto prohibited articles and literary works passed CPSU regulations. In the late 1980s, socialist realism was more liberally interpreted; it still, however, retained the basic tenets instituted by the Bolshevik leadership.

### **Leninist Principles**

Calls for the politicization of literature and art appeared in the works of several radical nineteenth-century Russian thinkers. The literary critic Vissarion Belinskii (1811–48) called upon literary figures to channel their creative energies toward changing the sociopolitical environment. He believed that writers could influence the masses by challenging the status quo through their works. Eventually, his philosophy of criticism galvanized other writers and other artists. Several of his disciples continued to advocate Belinskii's message after he died. Like Belinskii, both the journalist and author Nikolai Chernyshevskii (1828–89) and one of his followers, Nikolai Dobroliubov (1836–61), a literary critic, argued that progress could be achieved only if the individual human being were liberated and could espouse his or her own beliefs without feudal oppression. Both Chernyshevskii and Dobroliubov motivated writers and artists to contribute to this progress by criticizing society and presenting examples of human liberation in their works.

Following these radical ideas, the Bolsheviks, too, rejected the notion of art for art's sake. Like the nineteenth-century radical theorists, the Bolsheviks held that media and the arts were to serve political objectives. Unlike the critical realists, however, who called for protests against social injustice, the Bolsheviks used media and the arts to mobilize the population in support of the new sociopolitical system.

One of the initial means for controlling the population through the politicization of the media entailed closing newspapers deemed anti-Bolshevik. On November 9, 1917, the new Bolshevik regime declared in the Decree of the Press that all nonsocialist newspapers would be closed because they endangered the newly formed government. In the November 10, 1917, issue of *Pravda*—the newspaper of the Bolshevik Central Committee and the main voice of the new regime—the Bolshevik leadership stated that “the press is one of the strongest weapons in the hands of the bourgeoisie” and added that, given its capacity to incite rebellion among workers and peasants by distorting reality, the press ought to be strictly controlled.

On January 28, 1918, the Bolshevik leadership decreed that "revolutionary tribunals" would be used to prevent the bourgeois press from spreading "crimes and misdemeanors against the people." On April 5, 1918, Bolshevik censors instituted further controls by mandating that "decrees and ordinances of the organs of the Soviet power" had to be included in all newspapers. By the early 1920s, all non-Bolshevik newspapers had been outlawed, thus giving full control to the regime. Such controls continued in the late 1980s.

### **Socialist Realism**

Similar principles of party control applied to the arts. During the early years of Bolshevik rule, the party leadership sought to enforce strict guidelines to ensure that literature conformed to Bolshevik policies and that dissent was stifled. With the implementation of the First Five-Year Plan in 1928, political controls over cultural activity increased. By 1932 the party and the government had decreed that all writing groups and associations were under the control of the Union of Writers. In the early 1930s, socialist realism became the official aesthetic doctrine prescribed for artists (see *Mobilization of Society*, ch. 2). According to this formula, artists, composers, architects, and sculptors had to define history in a realistic and truthful light based on its revolutionary evolution. Socialist realism demanded portrayal of society as if it had already been perfected according to Marxist-Leninist ideology. Under Stalin's leadership, writers served as the "engineers of human souls" and produced novels, short stories, articles, editorials, critiques, and satires within a restrictive framework in which they strove to glorify Soviet society and socialism.

Throughout Stalin's rule, socialist realism confined the arts to expressing a narrowly controlled party line, but when Nikita S. Khrushchev came to power in 1955, some guidelines were loosened. The short literary "thaw" in the late 1950s allowed artists more freedom and creativity. This literary thaw lasted only a few years, and with Khrushchev's ouster in 1964, artistic freedom suffered setbacks. Further controls prevented artists from expressing themselves outside the boundaries of socialist realism. Artists were imprisoned if they protested the party line.

Brezhnev's death in November 1982, however, initiated a very slow but gradual change in the Soviet mass media and the arts. Under the successive leadership of Iurii V. Andropov and Konstantin U. Chernenko, society experienced further loosening of party strictures on the media and the arts, albeit mostly during Andropov's rule. After Gorbachev assumed power in 1985, the

system witnessed significant liberalization. Topics previously proscribed were discussed and analyzed by all the mass media, and the government allowed publication of previously banned materials. The regime, however, still maintained ultimate control over the ways of evaluating the state, criticizing the past, and transforming the system. Mass media and cultural events enhanced the image of a "new face" and "new thinking" in society. The persistence of an elaborate administrative censorship system, however, demonstrated that the leadership continued to hold sway over the information revealed publicly.

## **Administration of the Mass Media and the Arts**

As of 1987, several party and government organizations exerted control over the media and the arts. Censorship extended from the central party departments and government ministries to their republic and regional counterparts. The CPSU Central Committee Secretariat contained various departments and committees that supervised distinct sectors in the media and the arts (see Secretariat, ch. 7). A government organization, the Main Administration for Safeguarding State Secrets in the Press (Glavnoe upravlenie po okhrane gosudarstvennykh tain v pechati—Glavlit; see Glossary), had to sanction any work published in more than nine copies. Government ministries responsible for large cultural institutions as well as state committees also concerned themselves with the regulation of state information (see Administrative Organs, ch. 8). The government news organs—the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (Telegrafnoe agentstvo Sovetskogo Soiuza—TASS) and the News Press Agency (Agentstvo pechati novosti—Novosti)—limited information disseminated to domestic and foreign newspaper wire services. Ultimately, government institutions involved in censorship responded to CPSU directives. The party ensured that only approved information appeared publicly. Underground materials existed, but the Committee for State Security (Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti—KGB) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs actively opposed the dissemination of any un-sanctioned material. The party, government organizations, and security organs combined with the other official censorship controls to guarantee party domination over the mass media and the arts.

### **The Party Role**

In the late 1980s, the secretary for ideology and the Central Committee's Ideological Department functioned mainly to mold popular opinion. The former not only regulated the media but also issued

directives to republic and provincial (*oblast*, *kraia*—see Glossary, and autonomous division) leaders to administer the mass media and the arts through the various “letters” departments (the media control organs that oversee “letters to the editor” offices), the International Information Department (foreign affairs information overseer), and the Culture Department. Parallel departments dealing with ideology and propaganda operated at lower party levels throughout the country to centralize control over local publications (see Intermediate-Level Party Organizations, ch. 7). Both the central and the local ideology and propaganda departments supervised culture, education, and science. In addition, as part of the party’s *nomenklatura* (see Glossary) authority, party leaders at all levels selected editors of newspapers, magazines, and journals within their domains (see Nomenklatura, ch. 7). According to Soviet émigrés surveyed in a 1982 Rand study, “The Media and Intra-Elite Communication in the USSR,” the Propaganda Department (which was absorbed by the Ideological Department in 1988) wielded great power in selections of editors for the central press organs and publishing houses. In many instances, these high positions were filled by party members who had previously worked in some section of a propaganda department, whether at the all-union (see Glossary) or at the local level.

### **The Government Role**

In the late 1980s, censorship authority was exercised by Glavlit, which employed some 70,000 censors to review information before it was disseminated by publishing houses, editorial offices, and broadcasting studios. Government censorship organs attended to all levels, in the forms of territorial, provincial, municipal, and district organs. No mass medium escaped Glavlit’s control. All press agencies and radio and television stations had a Glavlit representative on their editorial staffs. Although Glavlit was attached to the Council of Ministers, many émigrés asserted that Glavlit answered not only to the Propaganda Department but also to the KGB.

Although the Ideological Department regulated ideological and political censorship, the KGB handled classified information and, by extension, controlled Glavlit’s “administrative and staffing” responsibilities. Many Glavlit censors were former KGB members. The KGB and Glavlit worked together to implement a compendium of regulations contained in the *Censor’s Index*, which contained classified information on “state secrets” that could not be revealed in the media. Apparently, the index contained between 300 and 1,000 pages, with periodically updated lists of military, technical, economic, statistical, and other data on various people and issues

forbidden for dissemination. As a result, editors and writers rarely touched on proscribed material. If they published any unsanctioned information, the censors either instituted harsher publication restrictions or fired those who broke the rules.

The government also regulated information through the central and republic ministries of culture and similar all-union state committees and specialized state censors. The ministries of culture helped coordinate centralized censorship for Glavlit as well as execute other literary controls. Three distinct state committees implemented censorship policies throughout the country: the State Committee for Publishing Houses, Printing Plants, and the Book Trade (Gosudarstvennyi komitet po delam izdatel'stv, poligrafi, i knizhnoi torgovli—Goskomizdat); the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting (Gosudarstvennyi komitet po televideniyu i radioveshchaniyu—Gostelradio); and the State Committee for Cinematography (Gosudarstvennyi komitet po kinematografii—Goskino). Furthermore, the dissemination of books on cultural, political, military, scientific, technical, economic, and social issues fell under the purview of separate government printing houses. These individual printing houses oversaw the numerical distributions of all titles, and they limited access to certain books deemed to be related to state security, even if the information was unclassified. The publishing houses also regulated the number of copies of foreign titles published internally and Soviet titles published for distribution abroad.

The government censorship hierarchy not only maintained comprehensive controls over information distributed by the news services worldwide but the official news organs—TASS and Novosti—regulated all news wire service information to ensure government control of information disseminated to the public. In 1988 TASS employed about 65,000 professional correspondents and journalists. Because TASS operated an extensive number of news agencies around the world, in the late 1980s its 2.5 million lines reached more than 20,000 subscribers daily. From 20 to 25 percent of its subscribers were media organizations that depended almost entirely on TASS for foreign and domestic reporting. Consequently, TASS officials, who were located in every republic's capital and in nearly all provincial cities, serviced many newspapers, some of which allotted nearly 50 percent of their news space to TASS-relayed information.

Created in 1961, Novosti supplemented TASS. Serving as the conduit for information that TASS could not accommodate, Novosti focused mainly on foreign reporting. By assuming responsibilities for feature stories, commentary, interviews, and other articles

featuring the best side of Soviet society, Novosti attempted to provide its domestic and foreign readership with human interest stories in ways TASS could not. Novosti's correspondents annually transmitted almost 50,000 articles. Together, TASS and Novosti served as the primary means for distributing Soviet viewpoints around the world.

Procedures for censorship of military and scientific information differed from those followed for other kinds of information. Before information relating to any aspect of the Soviet military was disseminated through the media, the material first had to have been approved by the military censor and then by Glavlit. This complex censorship process began with the first-level editor in Moscow, who censored the article and sent a letter detailing the author's background and sources used to a military censor. Once it reached the military censorship authorities of the General Staff, the material had to be sanctioned again before it reached the penultimate stage—review by the political-military and KGB editors. Whether the information was regional or all-union in scope, the Main Political Directorate of the Soviet Army and Navy and the military directorate of the KGB reportedly advised, if not instructed, the military censors, despite the military censors' official obligations to the General Staff. Once these military officers had read and approved the article, it went to the Glavlit censors for publication. If the military officers had any hesitation about a piece, they had the authority to request that the editor discuss with them any aspect of the article under question. Soviet sources also have revealed that once the Glavlit censors received the edited piece from the military officers, they never questioned the revisions and routinely distributed the article to the appropriate media.

Similar procedures applied to science censors within the Academy of Sciences (see Glossary), who targeted material related to "national defense" in the areas of science and technology. Censors specializing in various scientific disciplines concentrated on stripping any material that could be construed to reveal the regime's national security policies. For example, publications and broadcasts related to outer space events were examined by the Commission on Research and Exploitation of Cosmic Space, associated with the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences.

Other censors concentrated on such topics as radio electronics, chemistry, geology, and computer science. The atomic energy censors, located at the State Committee for the Utilization of Atomic Energy, oversaw materials concentrating on nuclear energy, even those that focused on science fiction. After approval by the specialized censors, the works were referred to Glavlit.

*Man posting a copy of  
Pravda, the CPSU newspaper,  
at a sidewalk display in  
Odessa, Ukrainian Republic*  
*Courtesy Jimmy Pritchard*



## The Mass Media

The mass media acted as an instrument of the CPSU, not only to control society but also to mobilize it. Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership depended on the media to win support for the new regime. Indeed, without important communications links from the party to the people, the Bolsheviks' message would never have been broadly disseminated. During the early years, the leadership sought to galvanize the population by spreading the party line and encouraging the population to build a strong communist society, exhorting it through editorials, commentaries, and tributes in newspapers, journals, and radio. Over time, television, films, and computers became essential components of the CPSU's agitprop (see Glossary) efforts, as well as of its campaigns to spread Marxist-Leninist values among the people. The technological information revolution forced the party to reevaluate its efforts to control the masses because advances in technology also created the potential for communications links outside regime control. For example, with the spread of video cassette recorders (VCRs) in the late 1980s, the party leadership faced the problems created by the underground circulation of video tapes, in addition to the circulation of illegal periodicals.

### Newspapers

In 1988 the regime published more than 8,000 daily newspapers

in approximately sixty languages, with a combined circulation of about 170 million. Every all-union newspaper was circulated in its Russian-language version. Nearly 3,000 newspapers, however, reached the population in non-Russian languages. Minority-language newspapers constituted roughly 25 percent of the total circulation, although non-Russians made up almost 50 percent of the population (see *Nationalities of the Soviet Union*, ch. 4).

All newspaper reporters and editors belonged to the party-controlled Union of Journalists, composed of nearly 74,000 members. In 1988 some 80 percent of the union's reporters and editors were party members. Inevitably, assignments of editors had to be approved by the party. In the late 1980s, all the central editors in chief of major all-union newspapers belonged to the CPSU Central Committee. The party also sought to control journalists by combining higher education and higher party schools with schools of journalism (see *Training*, ch. 7). Reporters and editors thus were trained under the aegis of the professional party elite. For newspaper journalists and television and radio reporters, newspaper photographers, and literary editors, Moscow University's School of Journalism provided a main conduit to party positions concerned with the media. In the 1980s, some 2,500 graduate, undergraduate, evening school, and correspondence students annually graduated from the School of Journalism. Students were taught party strictures within the following eight departments: theory and practice of the party-Soviet press, history of the party-Soviet press, television and radio broadcasting, movie-making and editorial-publishing work, foreign press and literature, Russian journalism and literature, stylistics of the Russian language, and techniques of newspaper work and information media. By the late 1980s, Moscow University's School of Journalism had graduated approximately 100,000 journalists.

Party members supposedly read the all-union newspapers differently from their nonparty counterparts. Trained to scan certain sections of the paper, party members read with an eye toward instruction and guidance. In contrast to nonparty members, the loyal party elite apparently first read any article or editorial related to ideology, the *Party Rules* (see *Glossary*), or instructions. By contrast, most nonparty members reportedly read the international news first, followed by sports, science and culture, and economic events before they turned to political or ideological articles, if they read articles on these subjects at all.

In the late 1980s, newspapers gradually developed new formats and new issues. Under Andropov, *Pravda* began to print short

reports of weekly Politburo meetings. Eventually, other major newspapers published accounts of these meetings as well.

Under Gorbachev, Politburo reports expanded to provide more details on the leadership's thinking about domestic and foreign affairs. Before Gorbachev's assumption of power, Western sources had identified a partial list of proscribed topics, which included crime, drugs, accidents, natural disasters, occupational injuries, official organs of censorship, security, intelligence, schedules of travel for the political leadership, arms sales abroad, crime or morale problems in the armed forces, hostile actions against Soviet citizens abroad, and special payments and education for athletes. After 1985 Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost'* (see Glossary) gave editors a freer hand to publish information on many of these subjects.

In the 1980s, regional newspapers differed in several ways from all-union newspapers. The distribution of regional newspapers varied from circulation at the republic level to circulation in a province, city, or district. The party allowed many regional newspapers to print most of their issues in the region's native language, which reflected the Stalinist policy of "national in form, socialist in content." Local newspaper circulation remained restricted to a region. These publications often focused on such issues as local heroes who contributed to the good of the community or significant problems (as expressed in letters to the editor) relating to crime or natural disasters. By contrast, after Gorbachev came to power, most all-union newspapers began to report on societal shortcomings. However, in the late 1980s regional papers continued to contain more personal advertisements and local merchant notices than the all-union newspapers, if the latter carried any at all.

Originally, Lenin argued that criticism should be channeled through letters to the editor and would assist in cleansing society of its problems. He believed that public discussion would facilitate the elimination of shortcomings and that open expression of problems would create a significant feedback mechanism for the leadership and for the country as a whole. Lenin's ideas in this regard were not carried out by Stalin and Khrushchev, who apparently believed the party needed no assistance from the people in identifying problems. But in 1981, Brezhnev created the Central Committee Letters Department, and later Andropov called for more letters to editors to expose corruption and mismanagement. Chernenko advocated that greater "media efficacy" be instituted so that newspapers, for example, would carry more in-depth and current analyses on pressing issues. Gorbachev expanded the flexibility allowed by giving newspapers leeway in publishing letters critical of society and even critical of the government.

Newspaper letters departments usually employed large staffs and handled extremely high volumes of letters daily. Not all letters were published because they often dealt with censored subjects or their numbers simply posed too great a burden for any one newspaper to handle. The letters departments, however, reportedly took their work very seriously and in the late 1980s were used by the press to encourage the population to improve society.

Letters to editors on a great number of previously forbidden topics also elicited responses from the population that could be manipulated by the Soviet newspapers to influence public opinion in the desired direction. Because party members made up the majority of active newspaper readers, according to polls conducted in the Soviet Union, they wrote most of the letters to the editor. Thus, their perspectives probably colored the newspapers' letters sections.

Of all the newspapers, *Pravda* (Truth), an organ of the CPSU Central Committee, was the most authoritative and, therefore, the most important. Frequently, it was the bellwether for important events, and readers often followed its news leads to detect changes in policies. With about 12 million copies circulated every day to over 20 million citizens, *Pravda* focused on party events and domestic and foreign news.

Other newspapers, however, also commanded wide circulation. *Izvestia* (News), the second most authoritative paper, emanated from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and in the late 1980s circulated to between 8 and 10 million people daily. *Izvestia* also contained official government information and general news and an expanded Sunday section composed of news analysis, feature stories, poetry, and cartoons. *Trud* (Labor), issued by the Soviet labor unions, circulated six days a week, reaching 8 to 9 million people. It emphasized labor and economic analyses and included other official decrees. *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (Komsomol Truth), published by the Komsomol (see Glossary), was distributed to between 9 and 10 million people. *Krasnaia zvezda* (Red Star), published by the Ministry of Defense, covered most daily military news and events and published military human interest stories and exposés. The literary bimonthly *Literaturnaia gazeta* (Literary Gazette) disseminated the views of the Union of Writers and contained authoritative statements and perspectives concerning literature, plays, cinema, and literary issues of popular interest. A publication of the Central Committee, *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (Soviet Russia), was the Russian Republic's most widely distributed newspaper, with a circulation of nearly 12 million. A weekly regional newspaper, *Moskovskie novosti* (Moscow News), appeared in both Russian and English editions and reported on domestic and international events.

It became very popular during the late 1980s, both in the Soviet Union and abroad. The weekly newspaper *Za rubezhom* (Abroad) devoted its pages exclusively to international affairs and foreign events. Finally, *Sotsialisticheskaiia industriia* (Socialist Industry), a daily newspaper, concentrated on industrial and economic events, statistics, and human interest stories.

### **Magazines and Journals**

In the late 1980s, weekly, monthly, and quarterly magazines and journals numbered almost 5,500 and had a circulation nearly equal to that of the daily newspapers. The same CPSU regulations and guidelines that applied to newspapers extended to magazines and journals. In the mid-1980s, under the regime's less-restrictive censorship policy, both magazines and journals published articles and stories to fill in historical "blank spots." These articles included works of past and contemporary authors once banned and new works that challenged the limits imposed on literary society by previous leaders. Assessments and criticisms of past leaderships exposed many historical atrocities, particularly those committed under Stalin. As a result, in the late 1980s the number of subscribers to periodicals climbed considerably, and magazines and journals frequently sold out at kiosks within minutes.

In the late 1980s, these magazines and journals created reverberations throughout society with their publication of controversial articles. *Krokodil* (Crocodile), one of the most popular magazines with a circulation of approximately 6 million, contained humor and satire and featured excellent artistic political cartoons and ideological messages. In 1987 *Krokodil* published a short excerpt from *In Search of Melancholy Baby* by Vasilii Aksionov, an émigré writer and poet living in the United States. The piece portrayed Moscow intellectuals' fascination with American fads during the 1950s and prompted many letters to the editor that both praised and criticized the excerpt. *Nedelia* (Week), another magazine, supplemented *Izvestia* and appeared every Sunday, having a circulation of some 9 to 10 million.

Such journals as *Ogonek* (Little Fire), a weekly that became more popular in the late 1980s because of its insightful political exposés, human interest stories, serialized features, and pictorial sections, had an audience of over 2 million people. In 1986 it published excerpted works by the previously banned writer Nikolai S. Gumilev, who was shot in 1921 after being accused of writing a counterrevolutionary proclamation. In 1988 it also published excerpts of poetry from Iulii Daniel, imprisoned after a famous 1966 trial for publication of his work abroad. *Novyi mir* (New World), one of the most

controversial and often original literary reviews, attracted widespread readership among the intelligentsia. The monthly publication reached nearly 2 million readers and concentrated on new prose, poetry, criticism, and commentary. Many previously banned works were published in its pages, most notably *Doctor Zhivago* by Boris Pasternak. (The publication of *Doctor Zhivago* in the West not only resulted in Pasternak's expulsion from the Union of Writers in 1956 but won him the 1958 Nobel Prize for Literature.) *Oktiabr'* (October), a journal resembling *Novyi mir* in content, circulation, and appeal, espoused more conservative viewpoints. Nevertheless, Anna Akhmatova's "Requiem," a poetic tribute to those who perished during Stalin's purges, appeared in its November 1987 issue. Finally, *Sovetskaiia kul'tura* (Soviet Culture), a journal with broad appeal, published particularly biting indictments of collectivization, industrialization, and the purges of the 1930s. In 1988 the journal published articles indirectly criticizing Lenin for sanctioning the establishment of the system of forced labor and concentration camps.

## **Radio**

Like other party-controlled media in the late 1980s, radio broadcasts attempted to instill in the population a sense of duty and loyalty to the party and state. Every day the government broadcast an estimated 1,400 hours of radio programming to all parts of the country, often in as many as 70 languages. The main programming emanated from Moscow, where eight radio channels broadcast 180 hours daily to audiences throughout the country. Government domination of radio broadcasts was, however, not complete. Since the onset of the post-World War II Cold War, government programs have competed with broadcasts originating in the West, which have been aimed across the country's borders with the intention of providing independent information to the population, particularly on topics that censors desperately tried to ban. The government, until 1988, routinely jammed radio broadcasts by American-sponsored Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the Voice of America, the British Broadcasting Corporation, and Deutsche Welle, the broadcast of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) Ministry of the Interior. An estimated 2 to 3 million citizens regularly listened to these foreign broadcasts when the authorities were not jamming them.

## **Television and Video Cassette Recorders**

In the 1970s and 1980s, television became the preeminent mass medium. In 1988 approximately 75 million households owned



*Television equipment vehicle in Riga, Latvian Republic*  
Courtesy Jonathan Tetzlaff

television sets, and an estimated 93 percent of the population watched television. Moscow, the base from which most of the television stations broadcast, transmitted some 90 percent of the country's programs, with the help of more than 350 stations and nearly 1,400 relay facilities. Moscow projected some fifty hours of news, commentaries, education, and entertainment every day from its four channels. About 20 percent of this programming consisted of news, the main program being "Vremia" (Time), a thirty-five-to forty-five-minute news program beginning at 9:00 P.M. Moscow time. Between 80 and 90 percent of all families who owned televisions followed "Vremia" broadcasts. Normally, about two-thirds of reporting on each telecast consisted of domestic affairs, usually stories concentrating on the government, the economy, and important regional events. International news filled just under one-third of the format; three to four minutes were devoted to sports and two minutes to weather. Another news program, "Segodnia v mire" (Today in the World), which featured foreign affairs reports and short but in-depth news analyses, attracted from 60 to 90 million viewers every evening, particularly because it was broadcast both in the early evening and in the late evening.

Countless "firsts" were achieved on Soviet television, beginning under Andropov and continuing with Gorbachev. During

Andropov's rule, coverage was given to the downing of the South Korean airliner that strayed over Soviet territory in 1983, including a live broadcast featuring several high-level political and military leaders who answered questions from reporters without prior submission. With Gorbachev's accession, many live programs were broadcast via satellite television bridges (satellite electronic links) between the Soviet Union and the United States; footage and commentary were shown on the war in Afghanistan; the Chernobyl' nuclear reactor accident was explored in-depth; the Armenian earthquake was covered; and live interviews, speeches, and debates involving Gorbachev and other Politburo members were broadcast.

Almost every television program tried to include an ideological theme. Televised propaganda bombarded viewers in many forms; themes on the benefits of the economy were especially prevalent. Economic series, such as "Construction Sites of the Twelfth Five-Year Plan," "Winner in Socialist Emulation," and "How to Put Your Heart into Your Work," exhorted viewers to help to improve the economy. Patriotic films portrayed Soviet victories during World War II, and spy movies depicted the efforts of the country's security services to protect it from the "imperialist threat." Other programs featured lectures ranging from secondary school class instruction to party virtues, nonviolent cartoons for children, some game shows highlighting proper social values, and sports competitions. In an effort to create a larger viewer constituency, Gorbachev took advantage of television's popular appeal by being the first leader to use it to reach the population with his speeches and public relations campaigns.

With television, in contrast to radio, where the authorities had a difficult time controlling foreign broadcasts, censors could exercise greater control. Yet, with the dramatic increase in VCRs, unauthorized tapes circulated around the major ports and cities. This circulation complicated the regime's attempts to control the information revolution. In fact, Western specialists estimated that Soviet households contained approximately 300,000 VCRs. The problem of control became more acute in the mid-1980s as the policy of *glasnost'* led the younger generation to yearn for more information.

## **Computers**

After Gorbachev's accession to power, the leadership promulgated a new series of telecommunications and computerization goals. Some of those efforts had already been incorporated into the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (1986-90). They included a universal implementation of computers and data bases throughout the economy and an all-union computer modernization and training program

aimed at the younger generation. In 1988 Western estimates put the number of computers at 30,000 mainframes and 70,000 smaller computers. In 1985 a law requiring ninth and tenth graders to learn computer fundamentals was introduced. In the Twelfth Five-Year Plan, the leadership declared its goal to furnish high schools with at least 500,000 computers by 1990, representing 45 percent of national computer production. By the year 2000, the leadership projected that 5 million computers would be distributed throughout the schools. The Soviet Union developed a copy of the Apple II computer (called the Agat) and International Business Machines personal computer clones. In addition, the Soviet Union developed the Janus with Hungary and the MMS-16 with the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). All of these computer models, however, encountered production problems.

Achievements in computer technology may have benefited the national economy, especially industry and the military, but they also may have imperiled the leadership's ability to control access to information. The leadership's control of information was likely to be further reduced by a continuing rise in the number of VCRs, access to direct-broadcast satellite transmissions, and access to Western data networks that managers and scientists desired. Despite measures to suppress the dissemination of mass information, the regime faced a dilemma. It could not expect to compete with the West unless it modernized its technology and improved its computer facilities, yet it wanted to maintain strict controls over data networks and personal computer use.

## The Arts

Throughout Soviet history, the arts have played an integral role in influencing the population. In particular, literature has served as the main political instrument through which the leadership has regulated cultural currents. As, by Stalin's definition, the "engineers of human souls," writers were required to bolster policies sanctioned by the leadership. All writers, whether or not members of the party-controlled Union of Writers, submitted their works for party approval. After Stalin's death, writers experienced a brief literary thaw when some party constraints lessened. Not until the late 1980s, however, did the regime loosen its previously confining strictures on literary form and content.

The regime exercised strict controls over other forms of art as well. The leadership's political line dictated the content and form of cinema, theater, music, the plastic arts such as painting and sculpture, and the graphic arts. The party used the cinema screen to portray its societal ideals. Directors had to produce films praising

