

= Legacy of Leonid Brezhnev =

The full understanding of the history of the late Soviet Union and of its successor , the Russian Federation , requires the assessment of the legacy of Leonid Brezhnev , the third General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union ( CPSU ) and twice Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet . Leonid Brezhnev was the leader of the CPSU from 1964 until his death in 1982 , whose eighteen @-@ year reign was recognised as the time of social and economic stagnation in the late Soviet Union .

Despite his failures in domestic reforms , his foreign affairs and defence policies consolidated the position of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ( USSR ) as a superpower . His popularity among the citizenry waned during his last years , and the Soviet people 's belief in communism and Marxism ? Leninism slowly withered away but support still continued to be evident , even on the eve of his death . Following his death , political wrangling led to harsh criticism of both him and his family . Mikhail Gorbachev , the last Soviet leader , drew support from communists and the Soviet population by criticising Brezhnev 's rule , and referred to his rule as the " Era of Stagnation " .

Aside from the socio @-@ economic stagnation Brezhnev left to the nation , there was also a heritage of political and personal values . When Brezhnev died he left behind a gerontocracy , a group of leaders who were significantly older than most of the adult population . Historians have largely agreed that Brezhnev 's reign was one primarily of stagnation . However , in a poll taken in 2006 , 61 percent of the people polled viewed the Brezhnev era as good for Russia .

= = Immediate legacy = =

When Leonid Brezhnev died on 10 November 1982 Yuri Andropov was elected chairman of the committee in charge of managing his funeral . According to Time magazine Brezhnev 's death was mourned by the majority of Soviet citizens . First World commentators saw this as proof that Andropov would become Brezhnev 's successor as general secretary . The political corruption which had grown considerably during Brezhnev 's tenure had become a major problem to the Soviet Union 's economic development by the 1980s . In response Andropov initiated a nationwide anti @-@ corruption campaign . Andropov believed that the Soviet economy would possibly recover if the Soviet Government was able to increase social discipline amongst workers . Brezhnev 's regime was also criticised for ideological laxness and self @-@ indulgence . The gerontocracy established by Brezhnev was slowly phased out by Andropov , and new recruits were appointed to the Party " centre " , such as future Premier Nikolai Ryzhkov and Chief Ideologue Yegor Ligachev . Soviet foreign policy had also gone awry during Brezhnev 's last years , and by June 1982 , just before his death , Ronald Reagan classified the Soviet Union as an " Evil Empire " . This hardline diplomatic stance did not wither away before Mikhail Gorbachev initiated the " New Thinking " . Support for Marxism ? Leninism continued to be evident amongst the Soviet people , however , its base of support slowly withered during the Brezhnev Era . The Soviet people still remained wary of such concepts as liberal democracy and multi @-@ party systems , and because of it , Marxism ? Leninism remained the leading belief in the country . Due to the large military buildup of the 1960s the Soviet Union was able to consolidate itself as a superpower during Brezhnev 's rule .

Brezhnev 's family , Yuri , Galina and Yuri Churbanov , were investigated and all , with the exception of Galina , were arrested on charges of political corruption during Mikhail Gorbachev 's administration . Churbanov , Brezhnev 's son @-@ in @-@ law , was sentenced to twelve years in prison on charges of large @-@ scale embezzlement and corruption . By December 1988 Churbanov had been stripped of all state honours , and sent to a labour camp . Galina , along with the rest of Brezhnev 's family , lost all their state privileges . The city of Brezhnev reverted to its old name Naberezhnye Chelny , and a group within the Soviet leadership wanted to rename all towns , street , factories and institutions bearing Brezhnev 's name . This was actually carried through by the authorities in December 1988 when the Soviet Government issued a decree which stated all town , streets , factories , institutions and the like bearing Brezhnev 's and Konstantin Chernenko 's were to revert to their former name . According to his grandson Andrei Brezhnev , the very name Brezhnev

had become a curse for the family , and several family members had been forced out of their jobs and their friends had deserted them . Brezhnev , who had inflated his role in World War II , was rescinded the Order of Victory on 21 September 1989 in a Supreme Soviet convocation .

During the Gorbachev Era , Brezhnev 's rule was considered less successful than that of Joseph Stalin ; in an opinion measurement poll only 7 percent chose the Brezhnev Era as good , while 10 percent picked the Stalin Era as good . Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Boris Yeltsin 's subsequent market reforms , many Russians viewed the Brezhnev era with nostalgia ; they missed the stability of that era which had subsequently been lost during the Gorbachev and Yeltsin eras .

= = Historical assessments = =

Historians have expressed criticism for Brezhnev and his rule . The scholarly literature dealing with him is scarce and , with the exception of the period immediately after his death , overwhelmingly negative . Very little has been written about Brezhnev in English , and even Russian literature . According to Mark Sandle and Edwin Bacon , the authors behind Brezhnev Reconsidered , Brezhnev had attracted little attention from the media due to a consensus of his rule that was formed shortly after his death ; literally that his rule was one primarily of stagnation . When Mikhail Gorbachev , the last Soviet leader , initiated perestroika he blamed the degradation of the Soviet economic and political system on Brezhnev , and called his rule the " Era of Stagnation " . Gorbachev claimed that Brezhnev followed " a fierce neo @-@ Stalinist line " , although in a later statement Gorbachev made assurances that Brezhnev was not as bad as he was made out to be , saying , " Brezhnev was nothing like the cartoon figure that is made of him now " .

British historian Robert Service wrote in his book , Russia : From Tsarism to the Twenty @-@ First Century , that " When he [ Brezhnev ] succeeded Khrushchev , he was still a vigorous politician who expected to make the Party and government work more effectively . He had not been inactive ; he had not been entirely inflexible . But his General Secretaryship had turned into a ceremonial reign that had brought communism into its deepest contempt since 1917 . " He added that it was " hard to feel very sorry for Brezhnev " ; his socio @-@ economic policies had sent the country into an Era of Stagnation from which his successors were never able to fully recover . Talal Nizameddin states in his book Russia and the Middle East : Towards A New Foreign Policy that " Brezhnev 's legacy , generally unaffected by his weak successors ( Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko ) , was entanglement in Afghanistan , tension with China and Japan , as well as the prospect of a new dimension to the arms race with the United States in the form of the Strategic Defence Initiative ( Star Wars ) . " According to historian David Dyker in his book The Soviet Union under Gorbachev : Prospects for Reform " Brezhnev left his successors a Soviet Union suffering from a host of domestic and foreign problems " . The biggest obstacle , according to Dyker , was the weakness of the economy which had undermined Soviet influence outside its borders considerably during the late Brezhnev due to its relative technological backwardness .

The author of The Soviet Paradox : External Expansion , Internal Decline Seweryn Bialer has a more mixed assessment of Brezhnev 's reign . Bialer notes that the era was a time of " lost opportunities " , but admits that the economic growth during Brezhnev 's first years weakened " the rationale for radical reform " . However , as Bialer notes in his book , even the gerontocracy which Brezhnev himself had created were disillusioned with Brezhnev 's leadership when he died in 1982 . In his book Russia 's Transformation : Snapshots of a Crumbling System Robert Vincent Daniels argues that Brezhnev " gave the country stability , if nothing else , even though it was the stability of the police state " , and that his domestic and external policies tried to ensure the " status quo " . Daniels believes that Brezhnev 's reign can be separated into two parts , the first , starting in 1964 and ending in 1975 conforms to a " status quo leadership , building the economy , pursuing détente , and maintaining political equilibrium at home " . The second phase , which began in 1975 , was exactly the opposite ; the economy stopped growing , the collective leadership ended with Nikolai Podgorny 's removal , Brezhnev developed a cult of personality and the Soviet Union itself started to stagnate . Historians Jiří Valenta and Frank Cibulka noted in their book Gorbachev 's New Thinking

and Third World Conflicts that Brezhnev 's legacy was a " mixture of achievements and failures in both domestic and foreign policy ". However , they argue that by the time of his death his failures had become severe chronic systematic problems . Brezhnev 's main achievements , according to Valenta and Cibulka , was his foreign and defence policies , however , with the economy in decline these achievements were not durable in the long @-@ run . They also note that the Soviet Union was able to consolidate itself as a superpower , which in turn increased their influence in non @-@ communist Third World countries .

On a positive note , Ian Thatcher argues that " [ r ] ather than deserving a reputation as the most vilified of all Soviet leaders , Brezhnev should be praised as one of the most successful exponents of the art of Soviet politics . " He argues that Brezhnev was a good politician within the framework of the Soviet political system . Dmitry Peskov said " Brezhnev wasn ' t a minus for the history of our country , he was a huge plus , He laid a foundation for the country ' s economics and agriculture . " Archie Brown wrote in his book , The Rise & Fall of Communism , that " From the point of view of Communist rulers , the Brezhnev era was in many ways successful . " Brown adds that the Soviet Union reached " rough parity with the United States " militarily by the early 1970s , and became a superpower in the military sense of the world . According to Brown " The Brezhnev era was a time when tens of millions of Soviet citizens lived a peaceful and predictable life than hitherto " and where " Most people did not live in fear of the KGB . "

= = Opinion polls = =

Brezhnev has fared well in Russian opinion polls when compared to his successors and predecessors . However , in the West he is most commonly remembered for starting the economic stagnation which triggered the dissolution of the Soviet Union . A 2000 poll by VTsIOM asked various Russians the question " Was a given period more positive or more negative for the country ? " . 36 percent of the people polled viewed Brezhnev 's tenure as more positive than negative . His predecessor , Nikita Khrushchev trailed close behind him , earning 33 percent . A poll by the Public Opinion Fund ( VTsIOM ) in September 1999 similarly chose the Brezhnev period as the time in the 20th century when " ordinary people lived best " , having a clear majority of 51 to 10 . In a similar poll done in 1994 , Brezhnev garnered a majority of only 36 to 16 . According to a 2006 Public Opinion Fund poll , 61 percent of the Russian people viewed the Brezhnev era as good for the country . A poll by the VTsIOM in 2007 showed that the majority of Russians would choose to live during the Brezhnev era over any other period of 20th @-@ century Russian history . Researchers have noted a surge in Brezhnev 's popularity , along with other communist rulers , during and in the aftermath of the Russian financial crisis of 1998 , which is well remembered by many Russians for plunging many into poverty . When comparing these two periods , Brezhnev 's USSR is best remembered for stability in prices and income by the Russians and not the socio @-@ economic stagnation for which he is remembered in the West .