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ROY MEDVEDEV AND REFORM IN THE SOVIET UNION

A Thesis
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degree of
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By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the reformist ideas of the Soviet historian Roy Medvedev. Medvedev claims that the basically good and workable Marxist-Leninist Soviet system created by Lenin was defiled by Stalinism. Stalin’s prolonged rule led to a permanent distortion of the Soviet Union’s political, economic, and social institutions which, to this day, has prevented the evolution of socialist democracy in the Soviet Union.

Medvedev does not necessarily subscribe to all the same policies as Lenin; this would be unrealistic. He claims, different historical circumstances demand different approaches. Medvedev wants the Soviet Union to be guided by the principles of Marxism-Leninism that characterized political life during Lenin’s time: flexibility in approaching social and political problems, relative objectivity in decision making, and more freedom of discussion within the Communist Party. In other words, Medvedev wants the Soviet Union to return to the socialism that Lenin pursued; a Marxism which is more a philosophy of action than an unchallenged and stagnant dogma.

Medvedev concedes that Lenin was unable to create a system that was completely in agreement with his ideas. Once the Bolshevik Party was in power, Lenin restricted political democracy and instituted one-party rule. Medvedev claims that Lenin considered restrictions on political democracy a temporary response to the external and internal difficulties at
that time. The real enemy of democracy in the Soviet Union was Stalin, who transformed Lenin's temporary policies into permanent features of the Soviet system.

Medvedev realizes that removing Stalin's perversions of Leninism is difficult because Stalinism contaminated virtually every aspect of Soviet life. The negative effects of Stalinism can be overcome only by using authentic Marxist-Leninist principles for the development of socialist democracy. Medvedev believes that a revitalized Communist Party could be the guiding force in the Soviet democratization process.

Medvedev's reformist ideas touch the Soviet structure at all levels. He wants to reform the Communist Party and replace Stalin's "bureaucratic centralism" with inner-party democracy, free and secret elections for all party and government posts, and the creation of other political parties. Most important, the functions of the Party and government institutions are to be separated and the Soviets should become true legislative and representative bodies. Likewise, effective mechanisms of control from below, both within the Party and the government, have to be created. The Soviet legal system needs to be revised and safeguards have to be established to protect the people against legal abuses. Medvedev also advocates reforms in the administration of the economy. He believes that a decentralized management combined with worker-involvement in the decision-making process would enhance Soviet economic performance.
Medvedev's long-standing recommendations have gained importance in light of the ongoing reform process in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's program of perestroika addresses many of the questions raised by Medvedev. Gorbachev wants the Soviet Union to become a more democratic country and has initiated various political processes toward that end. He seeks structural changes in the Communist Party, a greater voice for the Soviet people in the political process, a separation of the functions of Party and state, and to modify the legal system. Gorbachev's new policies are important steps in making Soviet society more open. It is, however, doubtful whether perestroika will produce genuine socialist democracy because Gorbachev's reforms limit political reform to changes within the existing political structure.

Medvedev and Gorbachev view themselves as Leninists, yet they have different perceptions about the meaning of socialist democracy. Medvedev derives his concept of socialist democracy from both Lenin's theoretical and practical work. Gorbachev, on the other hand, focuses primarily on Lenin's legacy as a political leader. This raises the question whether Medvedev and Gorbachev, in fact, interpret Leninism from a similar perspective and whether genuine socialist democracy can be realized without changing the basic structure of the political system created by Lenin.
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the reformist ideas of the Soviet historian Roy A. Medvedev. Medvedev has not been permitted to publicly express his political views in the Soviet Union for more than twenty years. This has changed under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev and his policy of glasnost. Medvedev’s views now are published occasionally in the Soviet press and he is considered a respected Marxist-Leninist theorist. His concept of socialist democracy has gained significance in current Soviet politics because Gorbachev has made it a goal to reform the structure of the Soviet system and to promote democracy.

Among the various groups of Soviet dissidents that emerged after Nikita Khrushchev’s overthrow in 1964, Medvedev represents the leading spokesman for those who seek to restore true Marxist-Leninist principles in the Soviet political system. Medvedev claims that the basically good and workable Marxist-Leninist Soviet system was defiled by Stalinism. Joseph Stalin’s prolonged dictatorship had negative effects upon the political, economic, and social structure of the Soviet Union which the country has yet to overcome. Medvedev claims that the Soviet Union can eliminate the effects of Stalinism only by returning to the socialism that Lenin pursued, i.e. a Marxism which is more a philosophy of action than an unchallenged and stagnant dogma.
Although Stalin’s successors introduced some changes, these have proven ineffective because reforms have not focused on the elimination of the most enduring remnants of Stalinism: the centralized and bureaucratized structure of the political and economic system. Khrushchev attempted to introduce some political and economic reforms. He was not successful because he tried to swim against the current that had helped him come to power. Under Leonid Brezhnev the Soviet Union reversed many of Khrushchev’s reforms and pursued a conservative and repressive political course. Nor was the basic political course altered under the brief reigns of Constantin Chernenko and Yuri Andropov.

Medvedev’s political views were shaped and influenced by experiences in his early life. He is the son of a Soviet Marxist philosopher and was born in 1925, a period when Stalin had begun to struggle for Lenin’s mantle. In the early 1930’s, Medvedev saw his father perish under Stalin’s terror. Although he was the son of an "enemy of the people," Medvedev managed to survive Stalin’s regime and was able to study philosophy at Leningrad University. He later pursued a career as a teacher and taught in secondary schools.

Medvedev became involved in Soviet history after the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956. During this conference, Khrushchev delivered the well-known secret speech which marked the beginning of a wide-ranging de-Stalinization campaign in the Soviet Union and its
Eastern European satellite countries. Medvedev joined the Communist Party in 1957 and became a strong supporter of Khrushchev's anti-Stalinist course. In 1961, Medvedev began to work on a study of the Stalin period, Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism, which he expected to be published in his country.

However, the end of the Khrushchev era in 1964 also marked the end of official de-Stalinization. Once again, uncensored debate about the Soviet Union's political past, present, and future had to be confined to the private realm. Fear among intellectuals that Stalin might be officially rehabilitated gave birth to the Soviet dissident movement and underground (samizdat) literature.¹

Medvedev's reformist ideas took shape during the Brezhnev era when he and other anti-Stalinist intellectuals were forced to exchange their views secretly. In October 1964, Medvedev became the founder and editor of one of the first clandestine publications, Politicheskii dnevnik (Political Diary). The paper was distributed among a small number of Soviet intellectuals and anti-Stalinists Party members. The purpose of Politicheskii dnevnik was to promote and further "in the context of creative Marxism the cause of anti-Stalinism and democratic socialist reform inside the Communist Party."²


²Ibid., p. 9.
Medvedev and his collaborators were determined to continue the anti-Stalinist debate and carry it into the Communist Party despite the government's efforts to silence them.

It is interesting to note that the existence of Politicheskii dnevnik was not known to the Soviet authorities. They learned of its existence through the Western press in 1971, after Medvedev had ceased publication of the periodical and, through his twin brother Zhores, made several issues available to the Western press. After 1971, Medvedev made his political views public and openly began to criticize the pro-Stalinist and repressive policies of the post-Khrushchev leadership.

Medvedev has written several books concentrating on Soviet history and published numerous articles in journals.3 To date, none of Medvedev's works have been officially published in the Soviet Union; but they continue to circulate privately. This may change, because Medvedev's works address many of the issues Gorbachev currently raises in the Soviet Union, such as political and economic reform and exposure of Stalin's crimes.

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3See Appendix for complete listing of known works.
I. VALUES FRAMEWORK

Medvedev and Marxism–Leninism

Medvedev considers Leninism a development and continuation of all the basic premises of Marxism. Leninism represents "Marxism of the era of the beginning of imperialism and proletarian revolution," i.e. Marxism brought up to date, given the historical realities of Lenin's time. Since Leninism is a continuation and further development of Marxism, it is obvious to Medvedev that Leninism, too, requires further development and improvement over the course of time. Lenin himself stressed that point when he argued:

"We in no way regard the theory of Marx as something finished and inviolate: we are convinced, on the contrary, that it only laid the foundation stone of that science which socialists must develop further in all directions if they do not want to be left behind by life." 5

In addition, Marx and Engels did not outline how a socialist society was to be organized because they were convinced that people would be able to solve their problems in their own way and needed no specific guidelines. Rather, Marx and Engels underscored:

"Our views on the features that will distinguish the future communist society from the present society are precise conclusions drawn from historical facts and processes of development, and apart from some


connections with these facts and processes, they have no theoretical or practical worth."⁶

Nor would this have been feasible, according to Medvedev, because the preconditions differ from society to society and, even under the most favorable circumstances, Marxist theory could not be applied in a dogmatic fashion. But he contends that "the main features" of the future socialist society "at least with regard to economics were readily apparent from the start,"⁷ because Marx and Engels stressed:

"the national centralization of the means of production will become the national basis of society which will consist in the free association of equal producers engaged in social labor according to an overall, rational plan."⁸

Medvedev does not see the essence of Marxism in the nineteenth century as a detailed prescription of the future socialist or communist society. Rather, Marx and Engels primarily sought to analyze the deficiencies of capitalist society as they experienced it in nineteenth century Great Britain, France, and Germany and to point out why they considered capitalism a "historically transitory form of society."⁹ Thus, Marx and Engels viewed their task as:


⁷Medvedev, The October Revolution, p. 83.


⁹Medvedev, October Revolution, p. 83.
"to explain the historical mission of the working class as the gravedigger of capitalism, to work out the ways and means of organizing the proletariat as a class, building a revolutionary political party of the proletariat, and laying the basis for its political and economic program."\(^{10}\)

The founding of the Working Men's International Association (otherwise known as the First International) in 1864 was Marx's first attempt to unite the European labor movement and to prepare its members for the overthrow of bourgeois capitalist society. Furthermore, Marx considered the Paris Commune to be the first historical experience of a "dictatorship of the proletariat," although it survived for only 72 days. The First International declined after the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871.

The demise of the First International and the Paris Commune did not mean the end of the working class movement. The movement progressed and throughout Europe labor and socialist parties emerged under the leadership of disciples of Marx and Engels, namely August Bebel, Karl Kautsky, G.U. Plekhanov, and V.I. Lenin. They all introduced refinements and elaborations on Marxist theory in light of their own experiences.\(^{11}\) But Medvedev is convinced that, "genuine development of revolutionary Marxism is primarily associated with the name of Lenin," who "in accordance with the specific contours of his time ... placed special emphasis on the theory

\(^{10}\)Ibid.

\(^{11}\)Medvedev, On Socialist Democracy, p. 323.
of socialist revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat."\textsuperscript{12}

However, Medvedev does not claim that the Bolsheviks were Marx’s closest disciples. In pre-revolutionary Russia, the Mensheviks rather than the Bolsheviks followed Marx’s theory most faithfully. But, in his view:

"scrupulously abiding by a Master’s dogma in every detail doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re his best disciple or most direct heir. ... and only history and experience will determine who has really best continued Marx’s ideas and course."\textsuperscript{13}

Because he considers Marxism a scientific social theory, it is obvious to Medvedev that attempts to apply Marx’s thought in practice produced results that were in some aspects close to the basic tenets but differed in others. This is predicated on the assumption that societies do not develop in the same way and different historical circumstances demand different interpretations and applications of Marxism. Medvedev claims that this interpretation does not represent a deviation from the original theory. Rather, it constitutes a further development and is in total agreement with Marx’s ideas.

Lenin adapted Marxism to the specific conditions of Russia. This meant that "along with certain universal truths" Lenin had to include in his interpretation "propositions largely applicable to Russia alone."\textsuperscript{14} One of the peculiar

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 324.


\textsuperscript{14}Medvedev, \textit{On Socialist Democracy}, p. 324.
conditions of Russia was the absence of a strong working class to prepare for and carry out a socialist revolution. Nor was Russia an advanced industrial society, both of which represent the foremost pillars of Marxist revolutionary theory. Yet, the Marxist revolution proved successful because of Lenin's ability to further develop Marxism and to bring the theory into agreement with the social conditions of turn of the century Russia. Thus, according to Medvedev, it was Lenin who

"developed and perfected Marxism in accordance with the conditions of his own time.... he resolved many of the new problems that arose in the first quarter of the twentieth century, when Marx and Engels were no longer alive. Therefore until 1924 ... one can speak of Leninism as the contemporary form of Marxism."\(^{15}\)

Medvedev's views are correct provided one accepts the premise that in 1917 there were no other alternatives for Russia's future development; that the political program of the Bolshevik Party with its swift changes of tactics was the only solution for the country's problems; and that change was only possible through armed insurrection.

Medvedev is convinced that Leninism did not and could not produce panacea of all problems at a given time in a society's development, because social progress does not occur in accordance with prescribed patterns. Therefore, the doctrine has to be adjusted to changing conditions. This is one of the reasons why Medvedev stresses the necessity that "guided by the doctrines and methodology of Marx and Lenin, scholars must

\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 326.
continue and extend the analysis.\textsuperscript{16} Because Marxism-Leninism is a scientific theory, its interpreters have to go beyond the classical texts of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. It is their task to advance and expand the theory in accordance with society's development. This is the only way to prevent Marxism-Leninism from being turned into a dogma. Hence, Medvedev stresses that the followers of Marx, Engels, and Lenin "cannot and must not linger within the ring of those propositions and theories alone which were worked out ... by these great thinkers."\textsuperscript{17}

During his lifetime, Lenin continued that process and advanced the theory to meet the challenges of post-revolutionary Russia. One of the challenges Lenin had to face after the overthrow of the autocracy was to find a way to reconcile the interests of the workers and the peasants and to avoid a split between these two classes. Both groups had been united in their opposition to the autocracy and the landed aristocracy, but each pursued different political goals, i.e. the workers strove for better working conditions, higher wages, and more influence, while the peasants wanted to own land. Medvedev claims that after a period of failure and mistakes that cost the Bolshevik Party dearly, Lenin found the solution in the New Economic Policy (NEP) which responded to the


\textsuperscript{17}Ibid.
question of how socialism could be built in the Soviet Union
during one of the most critical periods after the Revolution.\textsuperscript{18}

Unfortunately, claims Medvedev, since Lenin's death there
has been no further development of Marxism-Leninism in the
Soviet Union. Rather, during the Stalin period, "the doctrine
suffered extensive distortions."\textsuperscript{19} And little has been done by
Stalin's successors to restore Leninist principles and to
develop the theory. As a result, Marxism-Leninism is out of
touch with the changing conditions in the modern world and with
the demands of Soviet society.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{Medvedev's Understanding of
Socialist Democracy}

Medvedev is convinced that Lenin's seizure of power
prepared the way for socialist democracy in the Soviet Union.
But, so far, the country has failed to continue his legacy.
Even from a Marxist-Leninist point of view, Medvedev argues, it
is obvious that "the economic and social system that exists in
our country is substantially different from the ideas that
inspired all Russia's revolutionary parties, including the
Bolsheviks."\textsuperscript{21} Despite the leadership's claim to the contrary,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{18}Medvedev, \textit{On Soviet Dissent}, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{19}Medvedev, \textit{On Socialist Democracy}, p. 325.
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21}Medvedev, "What Lies Ahead for Us?" p. 68.
\end{flushright}
the Soviet system represents nothing but "primitive bureaucratized variants of socialism and pseudo-socialism."22

Medvedev does not blame the absence of socialist democracy on the founders of the Soviet state or on the fact that Marxist-Leninist theory lacks a clear definition of how a socialist society has to be organized. He also refutes the idea that the Marxist revolution may have occurred prematurely because:

"the capitalist system in Russia had not exhausted all its possibilities and ... Russia was by no means a highly developed capitalist country ..." [and therefore] "... did not exist the maximum favorable objective and subjective conditions that would make Russia completely ripe for socialist revolution."23

By mid-1917, the majority of the Russian people felt betrayed by the Provisional Government and supported the political program of the Bolshevik Party and, thus, the creation of socialism.24 In Medvedev's view, the real enemy of democracy in the Soviet Union was Stalin because he transformed Lenin's temporary restrictions on political democracy into a permanent feature of the Soviet system.25

From a Marxist point of view, socialist democracy supercedes bourgeois democracy because it extends beyond guaranteeing political and civil rights and secures equal

22Ibid.

23Medvedev, The October Revolution, p. 80.

24The Bolshevik Party changed its title to Communist Party in 1918.

25Medvedev, On Soviet Dissent, p. 93.
economic and social rights for all people. In other words, 
socialist democracy represents an advancement of bourgeois 
democracy, because the struggle for socialism constitutes a 
continuation of the struggle of the majority of the people, 
i.e. the working class, for liberty, equality, and popular 
power. While in pre-capitalist society the struggle was led by 
the bourgeoisie and directed against the aristocracy, in 
bourgeois society the struggle is led by the working class who 
can secure their interests only by creating a socialist 
state.

Furthermore, in bourgeois society the interests of the 
ruling bourgeoisie and the exploited working classes collide. 
Only a socialist system can secure the democratic principle of 
majority rule -- or real democracy. Therefore, it is obvious 
to Medvedev that in a developed society, socialist democracy 
represents the only just form of government because it furthers 
the interests of the real majority, i.e. the working classes. 
He is convinced that in the Soviet Union the main goal toward 
that end was achieved with the October Revolution because:

"as a result of the socialist revolution, the 
exploiting minority was overthrown, and political 
power was consolidated in the hands of

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27 Medvedev, On Socialist Democracy, p. 32.

28 Ibid., p. 41.
representatives of the working people, who constituted the overwhelming majority of society."\(^{29}\) In addition to creating the political preconditions, the socialist revolution established the economic and social basis for the development of socialist democracy. Once the means of production were controlled by the new socialist state, the workers obtained control over industry and the peasants control of the agricultural land.\(^{30}\)

Yet, before democracy became a reality in the new Soviet state, it had begun to disappear. A few months after the October Revolution, Lenin restricted the political activities of his opponents and before long banned all oppositional political parties. This was one of the main reasons for the eruption of the Russian Civil War.

Medvedev explains these events from a different perspective. He argues that the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918, followed by a ban on all political opposition, was not the main factor for the eruption of the Civil War. In his view, it was Lenin's economic policy of War Communism, introduced in the Spring 1918, that turned the people against the Bolshevik regime. Medvedev believes that the war may have been averted had the Bolsheviks pursued a different policy than War Communism.\(^{31}\)

\(^{29}\)Ibid. Medvedev includes the peasantry who comprised the majority of the Russian population; in 1917 the Russian working class did not account for more than two million people.


Notwithstanding, Medvedev maintains that Lenin's restrictions on political democracy during the Civil War were necessary and justified, because "they were inevitable under conditions of an open, armed struggle of the proletariat against its enemies."\(^{32}\) But Medvedev insists that Lenin regarded restrictions on democracy as temporary measures which would be lifted once "the opponents of proletarian dictatorship renounce their attempts to overthrow the dictatorship by force."\(^{33}\)

Medvedev contends that the Bolshevik victory in the Civil War ended the state of siege. After 1921, Lenin introduced some reforms in the Soviet Union. Under the New Economic Policy, the Soviet Union allowed more economic freedom and private initiative in agriculture and industry. Likewise, a limited degree of individual political freedom was tolerated. Yet, it remains questionable whether Lenin's political moves after 1921 really fostered the growth of socialist democracy.

For Medvedev the role of the Communist Party as the leader toward socialism is undisputed. Moreover, he is convinced that

"the overwhelming majority of Soviet citizens are unquestionably in favor of the socialist path of development, ... even though ideas about what socialism is differ among many people."\(^{34}\)


\(^{33}\)Ibid.

\(^{34}\)Medvedev, "What Lies Ahead for Us?" p. 67.
Different ideas about socialism present no problem to Medvedev's understanding of Marxism-Leninism. He feels that no one group can claim a monopoly on the truth; rather, all people must be permitted to express their views on how socialism can best be achieved. In other words, since there is no single path toward socialism, all members of society have to be able to participate in finding it. But in order to do that, they require a specific environment: socialist democracy.

Medvedev defines democratic socialism as a social system which "sets itself the task of securing the greatest possible satisfaction not only of the material but also of the spiritual demands of human beings." This means that people must be able to fulfill their economic, social, political, and civil rights. Economic and social rights include the individual's right to obtain work, the right to cultural expression, to receive education, and other benefits from the state.

Medvedev defends the necessity of public ownership of the means of production in socialist society on the basis that socialism eradicated exploitation of man by man and that equal distribution of society's wealth is best accomplished by the state. Nor does public ownership of the means of production have negative implications on democracy; rather, it promotes the growth of democracy because the state guarantees equal economic rights and thus equal opportunities for all members of society.  

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35 Ibid., p. 68.
36 Medvedev, On Soviet Dissent, p. 97.
This does not mean, however, that Medvedev excludes private economic initiative or small private enterprise in socialism. He feels that private initiative should be established in certain areas of production and services where private management and ownership would produce better results and be more efficient than state management. Medvedev concedes that Lenin did not appreciate private initiative in the sphere of economics and believed smaller economic units were a thing of the past and therefore should die out. Yet, when the serious mistakes in his economic policies between 1917 and 1921 became apparent, Lenin realized that, contrary to his assumptions, a small private sector does have a positive influence on the economy as a whole and should be tolerated as it would contribute to the wealth of the community.37

* * *

Medvedev's understanding of individual political and civil rights is similar to that of Western political thought. While his understanding of socialism may justify limitations on economic freedom, genuine socialist democracy, however, must

37Ibid., p. 99. Medvedev criticizes Lenin's policy of War Communism from Spring 1918 until 1921 which, in his view, was a hasty attempt of trying to introduce socialism in a backward society. (Medvedev, The Bolshevik Revolution, pp. 133-136). Yet, at the same time, Medvedev praises Lenin's willingness to admit the mistake and correct the error by introducing the New Economic Policy. It has already been established previously that Medvedev considers Marxism-Leninism a social science that has to be developed in the course of time. Therefore, in his view, like any other science Marxism-Leninism has a right to make mistakes. (Medvedev, "What Lies Ahead for Us?" pp. 69-71)
guarantee full political and civil rights. These rights include freedom of thought, speech, information, and assembly.

Political pluralism embodies one of the main merits of democracy for Medvedev. People should have a right not only to express their personal views but be permitted to freely state their political beliefs, as well. This may be achieved through various forms of associations and political organizations. Medvedev argues that the Communist Party's monopoly on political power violates the basic tenets of socialist democracy and therefore "can only be a temporary episode in the development of socialist society." 38 He advocates that the formation of other political parties be permitted in the Soviet Union, because:

"Pluralism as I see it, must permit the existence not only of different parties having socialist platforms but of nonsocialist parties too, although in a well-structured and advanced socialist society they would never represent more than a negligible minority of the population." 39

In the same way Medvedev is convinced that the Communist Party will always remain the strongest political party if it adheres to true Marxist-Leninist principles. If authentic Marxism-Leninism is the ruling element in socialist society, the leading role of the Communist Party in building socialism would never be endangered by the platforms of other socialist or nonsocialist parties. 40 Thus, in his view, the introduction of

38Medvedev, "What Lies Ahead for Us?" p. 68.
39Medvedev, On Soviet Dissent, p. 112.
40Medvedev, On Socialist Democracy, pp. XIX, 46, 103.
normal political debate and a dialogue with oppositional forces would not threaten the Communist Party but would "promote the development of Marxist-Leninist ideology and the formation of a new more capable generation of communist leaders."\(^{41}\) In other words, competition with other political parties rather than the Communist Party's monopoly on political power would make Soviet socialism more flexible and thus more attractive.

\(^{41}\)Ibid., pp. 106/107.
II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY

The Influences of Leninism and Stalinism

Medvedev is convinced that the system of Soviet institutions and organizations introduced after the October Revolution lay the foundation for the future socialist society. While he considers the basic structure of the Soviet system to be in agreement with socialist ideals, Medvedev contends that, as a result of Stalinism, the Soviet political, social, and economic institutions have been drastically altered and have lost most of their original functions. Removing Stalin's distortions of Leninism will be a difficult process because the "cult of personality" had negative consequences on society as a whole.

Medvedev does not claim that Lenin created a political, social, and economical system that was fully in agreement with his original ideas. He maintains that, during the early period after the revolution, the new institutions of government could not develop as expected because of the Civil War. When conditions improved in 1921, Lenin began to return to some of his original ideas, and "the Party adopted a number of measures to decrease centralization and develop democracy."\(^{42}\)

However, Stalin's rise to power led to a dramatic change in the course of the revolution. His system of government "led to the most serious distortions in the theory and practice of

socialist construction" and "threatened the total destruction of the greatest achievements of the October Revolution."\textsuperscript{43} For Medvedev, Stalinism represents a total negation of the ideas of the Marxist-Leninist revolution: the elimination of exploitation of man by man and the all-around development of the human personality free from material want. Under Lenin's leadership, "the Communist Party started to build such a society" and "millions of people guided by the ideas of Marxism-Leninism moved toward that goal."\textsuperscript{44} The Stalinist concepts of socialist construction reversed that process.

In the same way, Stalinism meant a radical break with Leninist tradition and Marxist theory as a whole. Medvedev argues that Stalin proclaimed himself a loyal disciple of Lenin and a supporter of democracy and socialism, whereas in reality he extended and transformed what Lenin considered to be exceptional and temporary measures into permanent and characteristic elements of the system. Because he did not continue Lenin's legacy, Stalin created a social and political system that not only contradicted the fundamental theories of Marxism-Leninism but hindered the Soviet people's movement to socialism and thus the realization of democracy.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., p. 436.
\textsuperscript{44}Ibid., p. 549.
At least superficially, Stalin retained some elements of Marxism-Leninism. Medvedev is convinced that, "if Stalin had not continued to use Marxist terminology, he could not have forged ahead or maintained his power within the party."\textsuperscript{46} This was particularly important during his struggle with the opposition in the 1920s.

Medvedev refutes the idea that Stalinism is a logical consequence of Leninism. He maintains that "Stalin did a poor job of carrying out the historical mission assigned to him by the Party and the proletariat" and firmly believes that "with different leadership there would have been different results."\textsuperscript{47}

At the same time, Medvedev concedes that certain political practices of the Lenin era, such as limitations on inner-party democracy, and suppression of other socialist parties, made it easier for Stalin to establish a one-man-dictatorship. Medvedev does not deny that there were anti-democratic trends in Lenin's time; but they occurred in a different historical context than those facing Stalin. The Civil War and the ensuing political and economic crisis threatened Bolshevik rule; from Medvedev's perspective, it is indisputable that measures had to be undertaken to save the Soviet government from collapse.\textsuperscript{48} Medvedev also recognizes that certain other

\textsuperscript{46}Medvedev, \textit{On Soviet Dissent}, p. 91.

\textsuperscript{47}Medvedev, \textit{Let History Judge}, p. 505.

\textsuperscript{48}Medvedev, \textit{On Stalin and Stalinism}, p. 197.
features of the Soviet system, such as the lack of arrangements for regularly changing the Party and state leadership were conducive to the rise of Stalinism.⁴⁹

The long period of Stalin's one-man-dictatorship and his unrestricted use of political terror had negative effects on the ideological and practical work of the Communist Party, on the methods of governing the Party and the state, and on the economic, social, and cultural development of the country. Furthermore, as a result of Stalinism, practically all institutions were transformed. The Communist Party, the Soviets, and the trade unions, intended by Lenin to serve as organs to promote democracy, were transformed into bodies serving the will of the leader rather than that of the people.

Medvedev accuses Stalin of having transformed the Communist Party into a bureaucratic apparatus that dominated both the state and society. Stalin established a chain of command from the top down and "in party organizations at all levels unquestioning and blind obedience became the guiding rule."⁵₀ The concept of "democratic centralism," considered by Lenin one of the most important features of the Party, was abolished, because Stalin sought unlimited power and "was irritated by the need to consider the opinions and criticism of other leaders."⁵¹ To disagree with Stalin equaled being in

⁴⁹Medvedev, _Let History Judge_, p. 380.
⁵¹Medvedev, _Let History Judge_, p. 325.
opposition and was considered a crime. In the beginning, "offenders" were punished with expulsion from the Communist Party, later they were executed.

Stalin achieved party unity by forcing the members into blind submission. Medvedev claims that this contradicts Lenin's understanding of party unity, because Lenin "was never in favor of unity and discipline in the party at any price, regardless of the underlying principles involved." This is not the deny that Lenin often forced his will upon the Party. But, in contrast to Stalin, Lenin sought to achieve unity through discussion and persuasion and stressed that policies should be widely discussed within the Communist Party before reaching a decision. While Lenin strictly opposed unity on the basis of opportunism, Stalin demanded submission to his will because it served his political and personal ambitions.

Medvedev charges that the "Resolution on Party Unity," adopted during the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party in March 1921, was used by Stalin as well as dogmatists and neo-Stalinists, to curb freedom of discussion within the Party. He claims that Lenin considered restrictions on criticism a temporary measure necessitated by the political crisis that arose after the Civil War.

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52 Medvedev, On Socialist Democracy, p. 59.

53 The resolution on Party Unity seems to reflect Medvedev’s claim. Provision 1 states: "The Congress calls the attention of all members of the Party to the fact that the unity and cohesion of the ranks of the Party ... are particularly essential at the present time, when a number of
Undoubtedly, the Soviet government faced a difficult situation in 1921. Party members and Soviet people alike had become dissatisfied with Lenin's political course and demanded changes. Lenin introduced the resolution on unity for the purpose of limiting dissent within the Communist Party and to avert the potential danger of a split. The threat came from two inner Party factions: the "Workers Opposition" and the "Democratic Centralists." The former group emerged from the working class, the latter were intellectuals from the upper ranks of the Party. Collectively they challenged political centralization and demanded participation from below in the formulation of Party policies. In addition, there was disagreement within the Party about the future course of the revolution. Some groups supported Lenin's New Economic Policy while others opposed it and called it a retreat toward capitalism that would play into the hands of the political opposition. Another reason for concern was represented in the Soviet workers and the peasants. Both groups had developed antagonistic sentiments towards each other during the period of War Communism; this threatened the "alliance" between the workers and the peasantry and, indirectly, the foundations of Bolshevik rule.

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circumstances are increasing the vacillation among the petty-bourgeois population of the country." ("Preliminary Draft Resolution of the Tenth Congress of the R.C.P. on Party Unity" in V.I. Lenin: Selected Works in Three Volumes, 3:575.). Hereafter cited as Selected Works.
While Medvedev concedes that Lenin's resolution increased political centralization, he insists that in no way was it meant to abolish a member's right to criticize Party policy. Rather, Lenin felt that:

"criticism of the Party's shortcomings, which is absolutely necessary, must be conducted in such a way that every practical proposal shall be submitted immediately, without any delay, in the most precise form possible, for consideration and decision to the leading local and central bodies of the Party."

It is true that, despite the resolution on unity, there was more democracy within the Communist Party before Stalin came to power. But it is also important to recognize that the "Resolution on Party Unity" had already turned the Communist Party into a monolithic organization prior to Lenin's death. Lenin may have considered the resolution a temporary measure to gain the upper-hand in the political struggle following the Civil War but, in reality, he abolished inner-party democracy.

The ultimate beneficiary of the ban on inner-party factions and opposition was Stalin. He deliberately distorted the meaning of Lenin's resolution and made it serve his political and personal goals. Stalin administered the resolution not only to silence inner-party criticism but to establish his one-man dictatorship by expelling members from the Central Committee who disagreed with his policies.\footnote{V.I. Lenin, \textit{Selected Works}, 3:576.}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{The "Resolution on Party Unity" contained a secret seventh point permitting expulsion of Party members that violated the adopted rules. The secret seventh clause was published only after the Thirteenth Party Congress in January...}
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\end{footnotesize}
Hence, in Medvedev's view, during the Stalin era, "party unity increasingly came to mean unconditional and universal submission to the will of the Secretary General."\(^{56}\)

The suppression of free discussion within the Communist Party also meant a total ban on freedom of speech and press in the Soviet Union. By 1929, all non-Party journals and private publishing houses, which had been established after the Civil War, were shut down. This gave the Communist Party a monopoly on the press and information, which it has upheld to the present.

Medvedev considers Stalin's suppression of freedom of the press a violation of Leninist objectives. Lenin's "Decree on the Press" of October 18, 1917 stated:

"As soon as the new order is firmly established, any administrative interference with the press will be prohibited: absolute freedom of the press will prevail subject only to accountability before the courts and conformity to the law which will be unequivocally liberal and progressive."\(^{57}\)

It is important to note, however, that Lenin himself failed to live up to this commitment after the October Revolution when he instituted censorship of the press. Medvedev defends Lenin's restrictions on the press as having been necessitated by the political circumstances at the time.

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\(^{57}\) Complete text in Medvedev, *On Socialist Democracy*, p. 379.
Lenin changed his attitude toward the press in 1921. Economic decentralization was accompanied by the government's toleration of expression of personal freedom, including loosening the restrictions on the press. The new policy was further manifested in that the Soviet government permitted the creation of some private publishing houses and the appearance of non-Party papers. This confirms, to Medvedev, that Lenin considered an independent press essential to the survival of the democratic aspects of the revolution.\(^{58}\) He even suggests that, with the exception of military censorship and what were considered counter-revolutionary activities, complete freedom of expression and the press was restored. Consequently:

"if one studies the content of social-political, scholarly, and literary journals of the early twenties, it becomes quite clear that the party tolerated not only different literary and aesthetic trends, different shades of socialist thought, but also many publications and articles that were not socialist at all."\(^{59}\)

In this context, it should be noted that the term "counter-revolutionary activity" was an undefined category which served the Soviet government as a pretense to disband many opposing factions. Lenin denounced the other political parties, especially the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks, as counter-revolutionary groups and, with the help of the newly established secret police, he suppressed their activities and arrested and tried their leaders. The main reason behind


\(^{59}\)Medvedev, *On Socialist Democracy*, p. 188.
Lenin's attack on these parties was that both groups had strongly opposed War Communism and during that period gained influence among discontented peasants and workers. The abandonment of the policy of War Communism and the subsequent launch of the New Economic Policy put Lenin on the defensive.\textsuperscript{60} Lenin's use of terror was effective. By the end of 1922, Lenin had eliminated all organized political parties or driven them underground and established the Communist Party's monopoly on political power.

Medvedev argues that, by the time Stalin had become leader of the Communist Party, the precarious political and economic conditions, which Lenin faced after the Tenth Party Congress, had disappeared. Hence, there was no need to reverse Lenin's political course. What was needed, was "coordinated, effective leadership" combined with "local initiative and individual creativity" rather than increased centralization.\textsuperscript{61} Medvedev argues that centralism may have "suited Stalin's personal ambitions and the interests of the apparatus, but it certainly did not correspond to the needs of socialist construction or encourage the creation of a truly just society."\textsuperscript{62}

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\textsuperscript{60}\textit{See, for example, Lenin's speech at the Eleventh Congress of the Communist Party in March 1922, in V.I. Lenin, Selected Works, 3:671-712, esp. pp.687/688.}
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\textsuperscript{61}\textit{Medvedev, Let History Judge, p. 379.}
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\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{62}\textit{Medvedev, On Stalin and Stalinism, p. 188.}
\end{flushright}
Undoubtedly, Stalin's

"abolition of NEP, the hasty implementation of forced collectivization, mass terror against ... peasants ..., industrialization largely by harsh administrative rather than economic measures, the prohibition of all opposition both within the Party and outside, the revival of the tactics of 'War Communism' in utterly different circumstances." 63

did not reflect Leninist objectives. Nor did Stalin's widespread use of terror against the Party and the state and the murder of millions of innocent people have anything in common with Marxism-Leninism. Unlike Lenin, who used his power in the interest of the revolution and the Soviet people, Stalin abused his power to satisfy his personal ambitions. 64

After the 1930s, the role of the Soviets declined. Lenin considered the Soviets an instrument of popular control and expression. Medvedev claims that "during the early period of Soviet rule, each session of the Supreme Soviet was an outstanding historical event" and "the Soviets played a much greater part in government" than they did later on. 65 Stalin "converted the Soviets from organs of popular power at all levels into appendages of party organizations" and they became "silent instruments for the fulfillment of party directives." 66

This practice has remained unchanged to the present.

63 Ibid., pp.188/189.
64 Ibid., pp. 189/190.
66 Ibid., p. 136.
During the Stalin period, the trade unions suffered the same fate as the Soviets: they were "made part of the state and transformed into a simple appendage of party and economic agencies." Medvedev claims that Lenin viewed the trade unions as organizations that were to function independently from the state in order to "defend workers of bureaucratic elements in the apparat." In 1921, Lenin said:

"the participation of the trade unions in economic management and their activity in drawing the broad masses into their work are the principle means of combatting the bureaucratization ... and making possible the establishment of truly popular control over ... production."

Even more important to Medvedev: Lenin considered the trade unions to be an important means for socialist construction and management of the economy. The trade unions, argued Lenin, "should eventually arrive at a de facto concentration in their hands of the whole administration of the whole national economy." However, rather than following Lenin's direction and introducing worker participation, Stalin introduced a command approach to socialize the Soviet economy.

Medvedev maintains that Lenin considered the New Economic Policy a means to gradually transform Soviet society along socialist lines. During the Tenth Party Congress, Lenin

67Medvedev, Let History Judge, p. 534.
68Ibid.
70Ibid.
proposed the New Economic Policy, which outlined the new relationship between the Bolshevik state and the Soviet economy. Under the New Economic Policy, the Soviet government relaxed control over the economy and substituted grain requisition with a tax in kind. This was to encourage the peasantry to increase agricultural production which, in turn, was to stimulate industrialization. Having failed with his policy of War Communism, Lenin realized that this goal could not be achieved with coercion. During a speech in 1921, Lenin admitted:

"We assumed that we would proceed straight to socialism without a preliminary period in which the old economy would be adapted to socialist economy. We assumed that by introducing state production and state distribution ... we would be able to proceed straight away with socialist construction."\(^7^2\)

Given the country’s degree of underdevelopment and backwardness, the Soviet government began to realize that building socialism would be a long process that, according to Lenin, would span over an "entire historical epoch" and required the participation of the entire population.\(^7^3\)

During Lenin’s life-time, Stalin remained a strong supporter of the New Economic Policy. Stalin’s attitude

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\(^{71}\) See Lenin’s speech at the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party, where he explains the purpose and goals of the New Economic Policy, in V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, 3:562-574.


towards the peasantry changed in the mid-1920s, when he was convinced that the New Economic Policy fostered the reappearance of an exploiter class in the countryside: the kulaks. Lenin considered a more prosperous countryside essential for the development of socialism. For Stalin it represented a threat.

In 1927, Stalin used a crisis in agricultural production as an excuse to declare the New Economic Policy a failure. In contrast, Medvedev contends that the crisis was mainly caused by mistakes of Stalin and his advisers. Between 1925 and 1927, the Soviet economy experienced a surplus in industrial commodities. To reduce the glut in manufactured goods, the Soviet government increased the purchasing power of the peasantry by lowering agricultural taxes as well as the prices on items that the villages needed. Concurrently, the government raised the prices of agricultural products making it more difficult for the urban population to retain their standard of living.74 Thus, the living standards in the rural areas improved while those of the urban workers declined.

Instead of seeking a solution for the crisis within the framework of the New Economic Policy, such as raising agricultural taxes, Stalin first resorted to War Communism (which previously had proven to be ineffective) and then ordered total collectivization of Soviet agriculture.75

74Medvedev, Let History Judge, pp. 75-78.
75Ibid., p. 79.
Medvedev considers Stalin's move against the peasantry a serious mistake. Rather than increasing agricultural output, his war against the peasantry led to economic stagnation.

Medvedev claims that Stalin's policy of forced collectivization represents a gross violation of Leninist principles. Lenin stressed that the transition from private ownership of land to communal ownership was to be achieved with the voluntary support of the peasantry. During his speech at the Eighth Congress of the Communist Party in December 1919, when the failure of War Communism became apparent, Lenin outlined the basic principles how his government would seek to gain the support of the peasantry for their new economic program. Lenin declared:

"coercive methods can accomplish nothing. The ... task here is an entirely different one ... Prolonged educational work is required. We have to give the peasant, who ... is a practical man and a realist, concrete examples to prove that the 'communia' is the best possible thing." 76

In other words, Lenin recognized that the peasantry had to be persuaded by practical means that participation in agricultural cooperatives would improve their economic condition. This was to be achieved by supplying cooperatives and agricultural communes with advanced agricultural instruments, such as tractors and artificial fertilizers.

In contrast to Stalin, Lenin recognized that transformation of Soviet agriculture was a long and tedious

76 V.I. Lenin, Selected Works, 2:185.
process that would not occur along prescribed patterns. Because Lenin was a pragmatic leader, he relied more on experience than on detailed plans. This may explain why Lenin did not outline the characteristics of the envisioned cooperatives or set a time-table by when communal ownership of the land had to be accomplished.\textsuperscript{77}

Medvedev is convinced that Lenin considered the New Economic Policy a means to achieve step-by-step integration of the peasantry into socialist cooperatives. This becomes evident in Lenin's essay "On Co-operation," written in January 1923, where he states:

"All we actually need under the NEP is to organize the population of Russia in cooperative societies on a sufficiently large scale, for we have now found that degree of combination of private interest ... with state supervision and control of this interest ..."\textsuperscript{78}

Although Lenin knew that the New Economic Policy was not "the building of socialist society," he was convinced that through effectively guided measures it would create the necessary basis for its development.\textsuperscript{79}

Regrettably, Medvedev does not speculate how Lenin would have dealt with the "peasant question." When Lenin launched the New Economic Policy in 1921, he left not doubt that the Bolsheviks considered the freedom to trade and the

\textsuperscript{77}Medvedev, \textit{Let History Judge}, p. 74.

\textsuperscript{78}V.I. Lenin, \textit{Selected Works}, 3:758.

encouragement of some limited capitalism a temporary measure.
In other words, Lenin considered the New Economic Policy a
tactical retreat which would enable the Bolshevik government to
move ahead in a more offensive way once this policy had
exhausted its usefulness. In fact, only a year after the
inauguration of the New Economic Policy, at the Eleventh
Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March
1922, Lenin foresaw a struggle with the peasantry and indicated
that the day of retribution was nearing. With the improving
conditions in the countryside Lenin feared the rise of a new
exploiter class among the peasantry that could not be ignored.
Lenin predicted a battle "against the capitalism that is
growing out of the small-peasant economy" and "the capitalism
that is fostered by the latter."\textsuperscript{80} Lenin did not indicate when
the fight against the better-off peasants was to be waged but,
he said, it had to be undertaken "in the immediate future"
while "the date of it cannot be fixed exactly."\textsuperscript{81}

Undoubtedly, Lenin, had he not died prematurely, would
have faced a dilemma in trying to reconcile the interests of
the "dictatorship of the proletariat" with those of the
independent-minded Soviet peasantry. But Lenin probably would
not have resorted to the measures used by Stalin: terror and
coercion. Given Lenin's political pragmatism and his

\textsuperscript{80}V.I. Lenin, \textit{Selected Works}, 3:682/683.

\textsuperscript{81}Ibid., p. 683.
flexibility in confronting crucial questions, Lenin probably would have dealt with the "peasant question" in a more rational way.

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Although the most extreme features of Stalinism were eliminated after 1953, the basic characteristics of the Soviet political and economic system remain Stalinist. There were some attempts toward more political freedom under Khrushchev. For example, he made a beginning in trying to overcome the tragic consequences of Stalin's arbitrary rule by initiating open discussion of Stalin's crimes and opening the gates of the labor camps. After the Twenty-second Party Congress, the Communist Party introduced some political reforms and tolerated limited personal and political freedoms. However, the changes were short-lived and proved ineffective because they left the basic structure of the system untouched. This enabled Brezhnev to quickly reverse the more moderate political course pursued by Khrushchev.
The Prerequisites for Realization of Socialist Democracy

Medvedev sees the main reason for the Soviet Union's failure in successfully building socialist democracy in the "anti-democratic traditions and norms of public life established in the Stalin era, which have not been decisively eliminated to this day."\(^{82}\) As a consequence of Stalinism, the Soviet system has become an excessively centralized and bureaucratized form of government that dominates all aspects of economic and social life.

There is no doubt that, not only Stalin, but for the most part, his successors have thwarted the process of democratization in the Soviet Union, too. They distanced themselves from Stalin's crimes but, apart from making some negligible modifications, continued Stalin's methods of management. To the present, the entire economic and social system is directed from a single center: the Party apparatus.

This "enormous, clumsy governmental structure, unchecked by any countervailing social force" represents, according to Medvedev, the main obstacle towards political, economic, and social progress in the Soviet Union.\(^{83}\) He is convinced that the Soviet Union can overcome these difficulties only through political liberalization, because:

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\(^{83}\) Medvedev, Let History Judge, p. XVIII.
"only socialist democracy can give birth to the new
motor forces that are necessary to restore health and
life to the whole system of Soviet institutions and
organizations."\textsuperscript{84}

But to establish socialist democracy "not only substantial
structural reforms but also an extensive program of re-
education to overcome the effects of Stalinism on the
psychology of the people" are needed.\textsuperscript{85}

Medvedev is confident that Marxism-Leninism provides the
solution for the Soviet Union's problems. However, these can
be solved only by careful study and analysis rather than a
dogmatic approach as has been the case in the past. In other
words, the Soviet system can only become truly socialist by
"restoring the idea of socialism by undoing the results of the
cult of personality" and by critically analyzing "those
processes that led to the degeneration and the
bureaucratization of the state and Party apparatus."\textsuperscript{86}

Medvedev contends that in the present one-party system
with no opposition and no freedom of information,

"a reorganization of social and economic management,
an enlargement of political and civic liberties, an
expansion of socialist democracy can come not as a
result of open pressure by the popular masses and the
intelligentsia, but only as a consequence of
initiatives 'from above.'"\textsuperscript{87}


\textsuperscript{85}Medvedev, On Socialist Democracy, p. 114.

\textsuperscript{86}Medvedev, Let History Judge, p. XXIX.

\textsuperscript{87}Medvedev, "Problems of Democratization and Detente," p. 34.
As a Marxist, he accepts the leading role of the Communist Party in developing socialist democracy but feels that this necessitates that the Party itself undergo significant changes along the path. Above all, the Communist Party has to restore democratic principles within its own ranks because "there cannot be democracy in society at large, if there is no genuine democracy in the party."[88]

This requires that the existing misunderstandings and misinterpretations about Lenin's concept of party unity be eliminated and free discussion of all political questions be encouraged to arrive at well-founded and sound political decisions. This would undoubtedly strengthen the Communist Party's guiding role in interpreting Marxism-Leninism because only through interaction with some form of opposition can the Party prevent dogmatism and ideological stagnation.[89]

Medvedev contends that, unlike in the early 1920s, open conflict between various inner-party trends would no longer threaten the supremacy of the Communist Party. Political controversy may threaten one leader or another; but under normal circumstances, diversity of opinion has a cleansing effect on the Party by limiting the influence of groups that do not have the support of the people.[90]

[89]Ibid., p. 102.
[90]Ibid., p. 65.
Inner-party democracy further requires that party organizations at all levels have influence on party policies. This has not been the case, and the lack of influence in the decision-making process has rendered the rank-and-file members politically passive and indifferent to social problems. Medvedev strongly supports a change in the established practice of choosing delegates and party leaders from above. More influence from below in the selection of candidates and, above all, the possibility to choose between several political contenders, would turn elections from empty rituals into meaningful political events.

One of the main obstacles toward democratization is the huge Party and state apparatus. Medvedev claims:

"the administrative apparatus tends to become isolated from the masses and is inclined to take important decisions on the basis of its own interests as an apparatus rather than on the basis of society’s interests as a whole.”

Moreover, under the existing system, Party and state officials have become a privileged class with vested interests who fear democratization more as a threat to their entrenched interests than the existence of Marxism.

Apart from blocking influence from below, the cumbersome apparatus further presents an obstacle to effective handling of political and economic questions. Medvedev sees the main cause

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91Ibid., p. 111.
92Medvedev, "What Lies Ahead for Us?" p. 73.
93Medvedev, On Soviet Dissent, p. 51.
of ineffective management in the Communist Party's interference with functions that properly belong to the government. Legally there exists separation between the work of the Communist Party and the Soviet government. But in practice, the Central Committee and its numerous sub-organizations supervise and duplicate the work of the government agencies. For example, most laws or decrees which are normally drafted by the appropriate state agencies, such as a ministry or the Council of Ministers, have to be presented to the Party for thorough examination before they reach the Supreme Soviet for consideration. Although the Supreme Soviet has a right to modify or change legislature, this never happens, because "it would be regarded as an expression of lack of confidence in the Central Committee."^94

Restoring the bodies of government to their original function, i.e. to be the sole legislative and executive authority, would, in Medvedev's view, make the government more effective in exercising its proper role. But this can only be achieved when Party officials cease to interfere with the work of government organizations. Medvedev feels that the Party should exercise a guiding role in the affairs of the state; but this role should be performed by Party members that work in these governmental bodies rather than by sub-divisions of the Central Committee.^95


^95Ibid., p. 122.
The Central Committee should function as the core of the Communist Party and be "the principle center for ideological work and the training of cadres." Medvedev sees the proper role of the Central Committee not in a supervision of the government but in its function as a think tank devoted to the study and advancement of Marxist-Leninist theory.

Further, Medvedev is convinced that less interference by the political center in economic management would improve the performance of the Soviet economy. He feels that economic management, planning, and decision-making should not take place in Moscow but at local economic organizations. This proposal does not preclude the central authorities from exercising a supervisory role, but, Medvedev suggests that they should cease interfering with day-to-day economic management.

As already pointed out, Medvedev does not oppose centralizing the means of production in the hands of the state. But, he does suggest that centralization be combined with a rational decentralization of economic management to ensure more efficient allocation of material and human resources. The administrative approach to economic issues, which has been practiced since the Stalin era, in Medvedev's view, has impeded economic development. Not only does this

96 Ibid.
97 Ibid., pp. 231-173.
98 See Chapter II. of this paper.
99 Medvedev, On Socialist Democracy, p. 252.
form of management "preclude a scientific approach to the problems of organization and administration" but it also "reduces the creative potential of people in all fields."\textsuperscript{100}

Medvedev is convinced that more autonomy of economic enterprises from state interference combined with participation of workers in management would undoubtedly increase economic production. This would give the trade unions a more important role in the economy. They could serve as Lenin's envisioned schools of economics and teach workers to become more involved in the production process while, at the same time, providing them with material incentives to improve individual performance.\textsuperscript{101}

One of the most important prerequisites for the realization of socialist democracy is free discussion of all social and political questions. Medvedev stresses that freedom of information, including freedom of speech and the press, and the right to receive and disseminate information are essential features of socialist society.\textsuperscript{102}

The Soviet Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and the press. However, in practice, the Soviet people cannot make use of these rights for fear of being castigated. The contradiction between theory and practice makes it clear that,

\begin{itemize}
  \item Medvedev, \textit{On Socialist Democracy}, p. 262.
  \item Medvedev, "What Lies Ahead for Us?" p. 68.
\end{itemize}
"it is not enough merely to proclaim various freedoms" but that "specific mechanisms must be created to defend them and the rights of citizens against any possible abuse." Medvedev is convinced that a more independent judicial system may provide the Soviet people with permanent legal safeguards against violation of their constitutional and other individual rights.

Medvedev claims that the Communist Party's monopoly on political power contradicts the basic principles of democracy. There is no doubt, for Medvedev, that Soviet society has chosen the socialist path of development. But this does not mean that a small group within one political party should have the right to define that path. Medvedev observes that there are various political trends in the Soviet Union, some of which have the potential to grow into political movements. However, so far, these circles have been hindered from evolving into political organizations.

103 Medvedev, On Socialist Democracy, p. 167.

104 Ibid., pp. 67/68.
III. THE OFFICIAL RESPONSE TO MEDVEDEV

Past and Present

There is still a great deal of speculation on why Medvedev escaped the fate of many other dissidents of the post-Khrushchev period. For example, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Lev Kopelev were expelled from the Soviet Union; Yuri Orlov and Anatoly Sharansky spent several years in prison before they were released; and Andrei Sakharov was sentenced to internal exile to Gorky in 1980.\textsuperscript{105} In contrast, Medvedev was allowed to continue his open criticism of the Soviet government even during the most repressive period of the Brezhnev era. He was expelled from the Communist Party in 1969; apart from occasional harassment by the secret police, searches of his apartment, and threats of arrest, the regime did not forcefully interrupt Medvedev’s political work.

During the neo-conservative period of the 1970s and early 1980s, Medvedev enjoyed the support of moderate elements in the ruling elite who shared his anti-Stalinist views and were sympathetic to his reformist ideas.\textsuperscript{106} But, foremost, it seems to have been Medvedev’s ideological premise that spared him the fate of other dissidents. Medvedev viewed himself a spokesman of authentic and progressive Marxism-Leninism. Whenever

\textsuperscript{105}Sakharov was released in December 1986.

\textsuperscript{106}See Medvedev’s chapter "Trends Within the Party" in On Socialist Democracy (pp. 56-58), where he describes the existence of "party-democrats" who "as a whole are in favor not only of restoring but also of further developing Leninist norms in state and party life."
Medvedev attacked the Stalinist traits of the current system, he did so in the name of Lenin. His criticism presented a dilemma for the political leadership, because they, too, claimed their legitimacy through Leninism. Even more difficult was that Medvedev, unlike other dissidents, never challenged the status quo, i.e. the primacy of the Communist Party. Rather, he always emphasized that through political reform the position of the Party would be strengthened.

A further reason for the Soviet government's more lenient attitude towards Medvedev may have been the fact that his reformist ideas enjoyed the support of the Western political left, including Euro-Communists, who embraced his ideas of "socialism with a human face." Silencing Medvedev might have negatively affected the Soviet Union's image abroad, particularly among the more radical political segments in the West. Moreover, it would have further weakened Soviet influence within the international communist movement, already weakened because of the "Prague Spring" in 1968 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Medvedev may also have been left unharmed because he never advocated the formation of dissident organizations or participated in their activities. Nor has Medvedev sought to enlist the support of the masses for his reformist ideas. Medvedev has put his trust in like-minded people among the Soviet intelligentsia and hoped that their ideas might, in the course of time, be supported by a new generation of political
leaders who would recognize the contradiction between the demands of development and the unyielding structure of the Soviet system and draw the necessary conclusions: the need for democratization.107 During the 1970s, Medvedev closely watched for appearance of new political trends within the Communist Party. He remained a voice of the loyal socialist opposition and never gave up his belief that the Soviet system could reform itself under the right leadership.

In contrast to the practice of former Kremlin leaders, under Gorbachev's leadership the Communist Party began to establish some new form of dialogue between the state and the people. Likewise, Gorbachev has tried to bring talented and independent-minded intellectuals back into the system. This group includes the dissidents ostracized by Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko. It is important for Gorbachev to succeed in enlisting support of the dissidents because they have raised many of the issues he now addresses. Moreover, the dissidents enjoy the confidence of the people; therefore, if Gorbachev can enlist them for his cause, it may be easier for him to win the people's support and trust for his reformist program. Gorbachev took a major step in trying to bring the alienated intelligentsia back into the mainstream in December 1986, when he made a personal phone call to Sakharov in Gorky, released him from internal exile, and invited him to a private meeting.

107Medvedev, On Socialist Democracy, pp. XIX/XX.
There are no indications that Gorbachev has established personal contact with Roy Medvedev. But it is obvious that the Kremlin is no longer indifferent to his political views. Undoubtedly, the government needs Marxists like Medvedev, an outspoken anti-Stalinist, both in the Soviet Union and abroad. At a time when the Kremlin has ordered a thorough examination of the Stalin and post-Stalin era and is trying to free itself from Stalinist methods of ruling the Communist Party and the state, Medvedev avails himself as a longstanding advocate of anti-Stalinism. He may even be considered a catalyst for the government's crusade against the remnants of Stalinism. The rising interest in Medvedev also could be interpreted as some form of official rehabilitation by the new leadership.108

Between April and June 1988, Medvedev has appeared on Soviet television and in the press nine times.109 First, the Communist weekly Sobesednik printed an interview with Medvedev about the Stalin period and praised "his word and his role as a voice of conscience."110 In June 1988, the foreign-language weekly Moscow News printed an article by Medvedev concerning the origins of Stalinism. And in the same month, Medvedev was

108 The same could be said about the meeting between Sakharov and Gorbachev.


allowed to hold an official press conference for Soviet and foreign journalists.

In addition, Soviet publications have approached Medvedev about writing articles related to historical events. Further, they have expressed interest in printing excerpts from some of his books, including parts of his analysis of the Stalin period, *Let History Judge*, his biography on Nikita Khrushchev, and his recent book on Brezhnev. In this context it is interesting to note that, to date, some of the harshest criticism about the Brezhnev era, to be printed in the Soviet press, has come from Medvedev's pen. The article was published in *Moscow News* in September 1988 and its appearance was timed with the trial of Brezhnev's son-in-law, a former government official, accused of corruption and bribe taking. Together with Stalin, Brezhnev has become one of the main targets of official criticism and he, too, is now officially blamed for the Soviet Union's economic and social difficulties.

Although Medvedev is being courted by the Soviet media and has become an officially respected authority on Soviet history, the Communist Party has not restored his membership in the party. When a reporter asked Medvedev about his membership in the Party, he replied: "If they give me back my party card, I will accept it without trouble. But I won't apply."  

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IV. CONCLUSIONS

Medvedev's concept of socialist democracy appeals to the Western observer because Medvedev seeks to incorporate the humanistic values of Marxist-Leninist thought into Soviet political practice. His reformist program advocates a return to authentic Marxism-Leninism, cleansed of its Stalinist accretions, in order to reconstruct a social and political arrangement that is in agreement with Lenin's perception of democratic socialism.

In contrast to other proponents of political reform, among them Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov, Medvedev is profoundly devoted to the principles of Marxism-Leninism and the Communist Party that professes to realize them. Although he was persecuted for his political convictions, Medvedev never gave up his hope that the Soviet system, under the right political leadership, could be reformed. He is convinced that a revitalized Communist Party is capable of providing the Soviet people with the appropriate social and political environment required for fulfillment of their human needs.

Medvedev's ideas about democratic reform have gained significance because the present Soviet leadership claims to subscribe to Lenin's ideological premises. This philosophy has been manifested in the goal of fostering democracy in all aspects of Soviet life. In addition, Gorbachev and Medvedev concur that Stalinism constitutes a distortion of Leninist theory and practice. Does this indicate that Gorbachev and
Medvedev interpret Leninism the same way and they agree on how socialist democracy should be realized in the Soviet Union? Even more important: can socialist democracy, as perceived by Medvedev, become a reality in the current political climate?

As in the Khrushchev era, many features of Soviet society and, above all, its ideological foundations are being questioned. Gorbachev rephrases Medvedev in his book, Perestroika, where he states:

"the problems ... [do] not signify some kind of crisis for socialism as a social and political system, but rather were the result of insufficient consistency in applying the principles of socialism, of departures from them and even distortions of them, and of continued adherence to the methods and forms of social management that arose under specific historical conditions in the early stages of socialist development."\textsuperscript{113}

Gorbachev concedes that the Soviet Union’s difficulties are rooted in the Stalin period and that the negative effects of Stalinism have to be wiped out in order to resume the process of socialist construction. By turning to Lenin, the Kremlin seeks to recover from the numbing effects of Stalinism.

Apart from sharing Medvedev’s ideological assumptions, Gorbachev selectively borrows some of Medvedev’s concepts in his program of perestroika, such as reform of the Communist Party, limitation of the Party’s interference with the affairs of government, decentralization of economic management, reform of the legal system, and liberalization of the Soviet press.

To give the Soviet people more influence in the political process, during the 1988 Party Conference, Gorbachev proposed to reorganize the Soviet government into two chambers: a new Congress of People's Deputies and a reorganized Supreme Soviet.\(^{114}\) In addition, Gorbachev seeks to revitalize the Soviets, "as bodies of political power and as the foundation of socialist democracy."\(^{115}\) Like Medvedev, Gorbachev considers restructuring of the Soviets as truly representative bodies important towards achieving a separation between Party and government. Yet, while Gorbachev professes to have opened up the government to participation from below, he has left unchanged the basic procedure for elections to the Soviets. Thus, in practice, the Soviets remain dominated by the Communist Party.

Undoubtedly, Gorbachev's political course has made Soviet society more open. Medvedev has favorably commented on Gorbachev's policy of glasnost, which he described as "a decisive breakthrough" and "the beginning of a forward movement in the sphere of culture."\(^{116}\) He welcomes the Soviet government's promotion of open discussion of the country's history and social and political problems. Yet, at the same

\(^{114}\)His recommendations were approved by the Supreme Soviet on December 1, 1988. Elections for the new People's Congress are scheduled for March 26, 1989. The People's Congress will elect new representatives for the Supreme Soviet.

\(^{115}\)Gorbachev, Perestroika, p. 112.

time, Medvedev is "disturbed by the paucity of glasnost" and "the lack of information" on certain topics that still fall victim to censorship (such as full information about the ethnic conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the region of Nagorno-Karabakh).\textsuperscript{117} Also, in a recent interview, Medvedev complained that in an article he wrote for a Soviet magazine a reference to the need to look objectively at Lenin's legacy was omitted.\textsuperscript{118} The Soviet government now promotes individual freedom but, at the same time, it is obvious that glasnost will be fostered only to the extent it serves Gorbachev. Gorbachev seems prepared to loosen centralization, but only as much as it helps to overcome economic and bureaucratic stagnation. This he plans to achieve through a better distribution of responsibility among Party and government bodies. Likewise, Gorbachev seeks to improve the performance of the Communist Party by bringing in new people and encouraging a wider choice of candidates without really surrendering any of the Party's influence.

Nor are there any indications that political centralization at the top will be loosened. The opposite seems to be the case: Gorbachev is increasing centralization and thus his political power. He has become both leader of the


Communist Party and head of the Soviet government. This not only violates the democratic principle of checks and balances in government, but it further seems to contradict Gorbachev's own philosophy of separating the powers of Party and state. Gorbachev's move could have harmful consequences in the future because there is only one political party, nor are there institutionalized safeguards against the abuse of political power.

A further impediment toward genuine democratization is represented by the Communist Party's monopoly on political power. Medvedev's concept of socialist democracy includes the possibility that the Communist Party surrender or share power with other political parties. However, Gorbachev has consistently stressed that the Communist Party will not tolerate the emergence of competing political forces; nor will there be changes in the basic structure of the political system. He made that very clear when stating:

"We are not going to change Soviet power ... or abandon its fundamental principles, but we acknowledge the need for changes that will strengthen socialism and make it more dynamic and politically meaningful."\(^{119}\)

Democratization and glasnost are not the end of Gorbachev's policies; rather they serve as means toward achieving a different aim: economic progress. Therefore, the leadership will ensure that democratization and glasnost do not develop a momentum of their own. Medvedev, on the other hand,\(^{119}\)

\(^{119}\)Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, p. 54.
views realization of socialist democracy simultaneously as a means and a goal. He would probably question whether Gorbachev's policies meet these conditions, because the concept of perestroika confines political reform to changes within the structure of the Communist Party while upholding the Party's monopoly on political power.

This raises the question whether Medvedev and Gorbachev view Lenin's legacy from a similar perspective. Medvedev develops his concept of socialist democracy primarily on the basis of Marxist-Leninist theory rather than Lenin's practical philosophy. Although Lenin failed to come close to realizing his professed goal that the Soviet Union would become a true socialist democracy, Medvedev holds on to the belief that political pluralism was one of Lenin's ultimate ideals. However, Lenin's political course after the October Revolution does not support this claim.

It is true that, prior to the October Revolution, Lenin speculated about the possibility of sharing power with other socialist parties. In September 1917, he said:

"a peaceful contest between the parties in the Soviets, the testing out in practice of the various party programmes and a peaceful transfer of power from one party to another"

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was possible; yet, once the Bolsheviks were in power, Lenin did much to hinder other parties from participating in the political process. Likewise, Lenin supported the elections to the Constituent Assembly, but when the Bolshevik Party did not gain the majority in these elections (they only received 25% of the votes) in January 1918, Lenin dissolved the Constituent Assembly and suppressed the activities of the other socialist parties. Contrary to Medvedev's claim, this was the main reason for the eruption of the Civil War rather than Lenin's misguided economic policy in 1918.

Thus, Lenin already impeded the evolution of socialist democracy in the Soviet Union because he eliminated political pluralism when suppressing the other political parties, including those with socialist platforms. Lenin also abolished democracy within the Party and threatened with expulsion members who deviated from the political line prescribed by the Party center. It was primarily the absence of inner-party democracy combined with the Communist Party's monopoly on political power that facilitated the establishment of Stalin's one-man-dictatorship.

In contrast to Medvedev, Gorbachev looks primarily at Lenin's political legacy. The Soviet leader made that explicit in his book Perestroika, where he stated: "Lenin's works in the last years of his life have drawn particular attention" because they "were in essence his political bequest."123 In other

123Gorbachev, Perestroika, pp. 25,26. See also Ibid., p. 54.
words, Gorbachev takes as his ideological basis Lenin’s political course during the period of the New Economic Policy when the primacy of the Communist Party had been established and Lenin sought to appease workers and peasants by means of persuasion that his brand of socialism would, in fact, lead to a more just society. During that period Lenin also was looking for legitimacy of the Communist Party’s one-party-rule. Undoubtedly, Lenin’s toleration of limited individual freedoms and his proclamation to increase popular participation in the country’s political and economic life were to serve that goal. There are, however, no statements in Lenin’s post-revolutionary works that allow for the conclusion that he envisioned bringing political pluralism into the Soviet system. This is not to deny that Lenin attempted to make Soviet society more democratic. But, as may be inferred from Lenin’s political legacy, it was to be democracy under a single party’s guidance. By Western standards, this cannot be considered genuine democracy.

I am convinced that, in the Soviet Union, political reforms have to go to the heart of the system, including the structure Lenin created after 1917, if they are to contribute to the evolution of genuine socialist democracy. Lenin may have envisioned the emergence of a pluralistic political system but, instead, he consolidated a one-party-system. It seems that, once the Communist Party was in power, the concept of democracy began to hold a different meaning for Lenin:
political and civil freedoms as interpreted by the Communist Party and enforced by the new Bolshevik state.

Gorbachev appears to hold a theory of democracy similar to that of Lenin. **Perestroika**, he said, "unfolds the entire potential of democracy" and "revives the Leninist concept of socialist construction both in theory and in practice." But Gorbachev leaves no doubt that his political reforms are designed to promote greater democracy within the framework of the Soviet one-party state.

Like Lenin, Gorbachev is a pragmatic leader for whom Marxism-Leninism allows a wide scope for interpretation. Gorbachev knows well that political reforms must be limited lest they shake the foundations of the Soviet system. Medvedev, on the other hand, is a theorist who views Leninism from a maximalist perspective. He is unwilling to recognize that historical developments cannot be analyzed solely in terms of their motives but have to be evaluated in terms of their practical consequences as well. To examine this relationship seems particularly important because Lenin's political legacy does not support the claim that genuine socialist democracy was, in fact, his primary objective. In the Soviet Union, the realization of socialist democracy will remain a distant goal as long as the political leadership seems unable to find a consensus between Marxist-Leninist theory and Leninism in practice.

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124Ibid., pp. 32, 35.
Even though the most important aspect of Medvedev’s reformist program -- political pluralism -- cannot be translated into practice without changing the basic structure of the Soviet political system, he puts forward a meaningful theoretical concept. Medvedev proposes to replace the Stalinist Soviet structure with a value-system that recovers the democratic aspects of Marxism. Furthermore, Medvedev submits a reformist program that seeks to restructure the Soviet system within the existing social and political framework.

The present Soviet leadership attempts to realize, in practice, some of Medvedev’s theoretical recommendations. While Gorbachev’s definition of democracy is narrow compared to Western political standards, his policies of perestroika and glasnost do grant the Soviet people more personal freedom. By past Soviet standards, this is a remarkable achievement.
APPENDIX

Works by Roy Medvedev
(Including Place and Year of First Publication in English)

A Question of Madness, co-authored by his brother Zhores Medvedev (New York, 1971)

Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism (New York, 1971)

On Socialist Democracy (New York, 1975)

Khrushchev: The Years in Power, co-authored by his brother Zhores Medvedev (New York, 1976)

Political Essays (Nottingham, England, 1976)

Problems in the Literary Biography of Mikhail Sholokhov (New York, 1977)

Samizdat Register I (New York, 1977)

Philip Mironov and the Russian Civil War, co-authored by Sergei Starikov (New York, 1978)

On Stalin and Stalinism (New York, 1979)

The October Revolution (New York, 1979)

Nikolai Bukharin: The Last Years (New York, 1980)


Leninism and Western Socialism (London, 1981)

In Search of Common Sense, co-authored by his brother Zhores Medvedev (New York, 1982)

Samizdat Register II (New York, 1981)

All Stalin's Men (New York, 1984)

China and the Superpowers (New York, 1986)
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