

Djilas on Gorbachov

MILOVAN DJILAS & GEORGE URBAN in Conversation

1. Yugoslavia—Model or Anti-Model?



URBAN: A "revolution within the revolution" is taking place in the Soviet Union—so we were told by the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party in his speech at Murmansk (1 October 1987)—"a revolution without shots, but a deep and serious one. . . ." This is an astonishing claim. Gorbachov's language alone should give us pause, for there is nothing in the

Marxist canons to suggest that the revolution of the proletariat could be anything but the final consummation of History, from which a new order of man would arise, "free from taint of present vice and past depravity".

How then, can the leader of the Party of the victorious proletariat talk about "revolution" 70 years after the October Revolution? Was "Great October" not that universal reordering of human affairs that Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev said it was? Was it flawed in some essential respects we have not been told about? Did it go wrong, and if it did, who or what group of individuals was strong enough to thwart the will of History? Such are some of the questions the Soviet citizen is bound to ask without expecting to receive proper answers.

"Can the dictatorship of the proletariat be revamped into anything approaching a free and democratic society?"—this is the question Gorbachov's perestroika raises for a disinterested historian, although it is not the one he is, on the face of it, asking of history. Whatever his rhetoric, Gorbachov appears to be content to pursue limited objectives. At home he seeks economic reconstruction and consumer satisfaction, and abroad, strength based on an economically and militarily powerful and well-respected Soviet system. All this within a selectively applied Marxist-Leninist ideology and under the rule of a single, albeit, reformed Party. These are, nevertheless, towering ambitions. The General Secretary himself may well be wondering whether the existing Soviet order is resilient enough to accommodate them.

Two related questions come to mind. Can the Soviet system reform itself to an extent that would cause an independent observer to say: "The tyranny has gone—the system remains—but men of compromise can now live with it because it is, strictly speaking, no longer the Soviet system"? Second, can the Yugoslav example of devolution from totalitarianism to self-management and decentralisation serve as a model for Mikhail Gorbachov and his supporters?

DJILAS: The essence of any Communist system is the monopolistic rule of society by the Communist Party. Communism is about the possession of power. It is, moreover, about the possession of totalitarian power. Communism looks upon

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GEORGE URBAN'S contributions to ENCOUNTER include conversations with Vladimir Bukovsky (November 1987, January 1988), Alain Besançon (May and June 1987), Galina Vishnevskaya (December 1986, January 1987), Max M. Kampelman (February 1985), Alexander Zinoviev (April 1984), Jeane Kirkpatrick (November 1983), Eugene V. Rostow (April 1983), Daniel Bell (February 1983), W. Averell Harriman (November 1981), and Zbigniew Brzezinski (May 1981). His previous conversation with Milovan Djilas was published in the December 1979 issue of ENCOUNTER. "Can the Soviet System Survive Reform?", a collection of conversations by George Urban, will be published this autumn by John Spiers Ltd.

itself as fully entitled by the design of history to change and to control *not only* man's allegiances and behaviour as a political being, but also his readings, his tastes, his leisure time and, indeed, the whole of his private universe. Communism cannot, therefore, transform itself into a free society. That would be squaring the circle. What it can perhaps do, and what is now being attempted in the Soviet Union, is to make improvements in various economic and cultural areas, while keeping them, ostensibly at least, within the framework of the existing ideology.

Let us be quite clear about one thing: the Soviet leaders' attempt to reform the system is not inspired by some noble realisation that the system is unjust or poorly regarded abroad, but by strict necessity. They have come to realise what other Communists in Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and China realised much earlier—namely that Communism doesn't work. It works neither at the economic level nor at the level of satisfying essential human needs and liberties. Put all these factors side by side with the rapid technological advance of the Western and Far Eastern worlds and you cannot help realising that Communism is a 19th-century relic and a prescription for disaster.

The Soviet leaders are now trying to draw level with the modern world. Like politicians everywhere and at all times, they want to save their bacon; and they have come to see that they cannot save it without making concessions to reality. But it is only the *methods* of Communist rule that are now being challenged, not the rationale and character of the rule itself.

—The crisis of Communism is, as you have hinted, world-wide, but what is, ideologically speaking, so interesting (though historically much to be expected) is the variety of forms dissent and rebellion have taken in a once uniform and centrally inspired World Communist movement. I can detect two very important, common characteristics: the flight from any central model or authority, and the grudging admission that the command economies have failed because economic planning and human nature are on a collision course.

All the other centrifugal characteristics we now see coming into play have to do with national identity, culture, religion and group interests. Kazaks want to be Kazaks; Armenians to be Armenians; Estonians to be Estonians; and so on. The national—and racial—factor, long denied, derided or swept under the carpet by Marxist-Leninists, has reasserted itself. It will, I suspect, assert itself even more forcefully as Gorbachov's drive for economic decentralisation and autonomous management gathers disciples in unexpected places.

DJILAS: The crisis from Belgrade to Peking is continuous. Every Communist country suffers from the inbuilt inadequacies of the system. Most are now trying to put things right through piecemeal economic and social engineering. Those who offered more drastic remedies—the Hungarians in 1956 and the Czechoslovaks in 1968—were ruthlessly suppressed. (And I am, incidentally, not putting an equation mark between the two because they were differently inspired.)

What we now have in the world is a kaleidoscope of Communist societies, each struggling to keep its head above water, each still militant in its rhetoric but straining to go its own

way, even though some are not free to do so. International Communism no longer exists as an organised force. What Communists still have in common is a joint vocabulary and the will to monopolistic power. That is a lot, but not enough. Moscow as the seat of the Communist papacy has gone. Stalin as the grand vizier has gone too. Any analysis of the roots of Communism in the world today has to be specific to the circumstances of each country. Few generalisations are possible except one—Communism of the Soviet type is and will always remain totalitarian. The totalitarian character of the system may be more predominant, or less, depending on local conditions. But it is one of the iron laws of Soviet-style Communism that the moment there is a crisis and the survival of the system is threatened, the totalitarian component takes over.

WOULD YOU SAY, in that case, that the Gorbachov initiatives are untypical? or will not prove to be lasting? After all, we are told by the General Secretary himself that the USSR is in a pre-crisis situation (even if not in a fully fledged one). If so, it is the old totalitarians who should be calling the shots—if your reading of the system is correct—and not new-fangled reformers like Gorbachov.

DJILAS: The jury is still out on that question. The Soviet system is in an economic crisis, not (or not yet) in a general crisis of the sort that threatened Hungary's régime, for example, in the 1955-56 period. We shall have to wait and see how the Soviet economic crisis develops and how the totalitarians react to Gorbachov's rescue operation. The Ligachevs and Chebrikovs make no secret of their fears that the Gorbachov reforms may explode in their faces—as they may well do.

—Instinctive return to a protective old orthodoxy is a standard reaction in every human crisis, whether collective or individual. "Hold on to nurse for fear of worse."

The Communists, too, behave like that, only more so, because they are nature's zealots. Your study of Tito provides a telling illustration of the flight to orthodoxy in Communist thinking. I have in mind the passage where you and Tito discuss the kind of political freedom Yugoslavia should be given after the triumph of Communism.

DJILAS: I suggested to Tito that we should allow for an opposition—and free elections. Tito said that we should phrase the laws in such a way that while free elections would be on the statute books the Communists would, nevertheless, always retain the monopoly of power. It was, he argued, unacceptable for Communists to be ejected from power on the whim of an electorate once they had been installed in power by the will of history (or words to that effect). Tito reacted as a typical Communist.

—I find the Communists' contempt for the will of the majority and their parallel insistence on the "democratic" character of their system endlessly fascinating. "Democracy is not identical with majority rule. . . . Democracy is . . . an organisation for the systematic use of violence by one class against another",

Lenin observed in *"The State and Revolution"*. And, recently, Teresa Toranska, in her compelling interviews with some of the Stalinist Polish old-guard¹ elicited these words from Poland's once powerful Jakub Berman:

"... in an election, we can't go by the criterion of the majority, because there isn't any one we can hand over power to. . . . Well, whom would you have had us hand over power to? To Mikolajczyk, perhaps? . . . You'll be telling me in a moment it would have been democratic if we had. So what? Who needs that kind of democracy? And we can have no more free elections now than we could ten or twenty years ago, even less so, because we'd lose. There is no doubt about that. So what's the point of such an election? . . ."

DJILAS: A typical ultra-conservative attitude. Yet we must not allow it to colour all our judgments about the renewability of Communism. The arrival of Mikhail Gorbachov demonstrates what some of us have long suspected—that certain indigenous Communist parties, notably the Yugoslav and the Soviet, have sufficient inner resources left in them to shed the Stalinist incrustations and make a fresh start. The Soviet Party did have democratic features in its early history. Gorbachov is trying to water that desiccated plant and revive it. It is not an easy task because, even under Lenin, Soviet democracy was a highly limited affair—nothing a man sitting in Westminster or in the *Bundestag* would recognise as democracy.

—Would Gorbachov be aided by the Yugoslav model? Until Tito's death that model attracted many admirers and emulators in the East European Communist parties. More recently, however, Yugoslavia itself has fallen on hard times. The economy is in dire straits, corruption is rife, and the Republics are drawing apart.

DJILAS: Yugoslavia is both an example and a counter-example. It is an example in the sense that it demonstrates the reality of the conflict between the totalitarian and reformist wings of any Communist Party and the possibility of the defeat of the totalitarians. It is a counter-example in the sense that a speedy devolution of power from the centre to the autonomous constituent Republics can lead to chaos.

To take the positive model first. Yugoslavia has become a kind of laboratory for the destiny of Communism world-wide. The show (even if not the reality) of self-management, cultural liberalisation, local autonomy, economic partnership with the West, has marked her out as a front runner. But, more important, the Party is also vaguely groping for a re-conceptualisation of the whole Communist experiment. The conservative old-guard has not been finally defeated, but it is in a minority and probably in permanent opposition. At the same time, the "reformers" cannot be said to be in power either. The majority of Yugoslav Communists are in a state of alienation and grave disaffection, as is the majority

of the population outside the Party. Between them they keep the Stalinist hard-liners at bay and the leadership under pressure—without quite knowing how precisely to set about reforming the system and attracting public support.

Local autonomy has led to great variations in the hardline/softline spectrum. Semi-independent fiefdoms have developed—some hardline such as the Republic of Bosnia, and some liberal such as Slovenia. Centrifugal nationalistic interests are frequently intertwined with vested personal and institutional interests. If Yugoslavia is a positive model, it is easier to *feel* than to describe what it is; and that may not be too helpful to Gorbachov.

—Then, in the final analysis, Yugoslavia demonstrates a reckoning with paleo-Communism of whatever provenance, and probably a recognition that the whole idea of putting Leninism into practice is absurd.

DJILAS: It does both, but let me add a note of caution. As paleo-Communism is now a relic, so the language of old-fashioned anti-Communism should be. There is a kind of gutter-critique of Communist thinking that was probably justified by its effects during the Cold War but is now wholly counter-productive. It is puerile to say that "all Communists are tarred with the same brush" or "once a Communist, always a Communist". That sort of rhetoric, quite apart from being false, now plays directly into the hands of the old guard. I am, of course, not saying that we should soften our critique of Communism as a flawed or even impossible social system. But we should address the system with the seriousness and intellectual discernment it deserves. Millions of people have, willy-nilly, come to live under Communism. We owe it to them to offer an intellectually respectable, well-argued, and realistic alternative. The Hollywood-type of anti-Communism will not do. We have seen too much sloganeering, and too little mature assimilation of the social and intellectual history of Marxism and Leninism.

BUT ISN'T it possible that too much study of the history and of the rationale of Communism tends to make us subliminally accept the Marxist-Leninists' terms of reference? (Hasn't it happened in many foreign ministries and research establishments?) And doesn't this approach undermine our ability to think about Communism with complete freedom? American conservatives of the country club type tend to say: "Don't plague us with the 'theology'! We know perfectly well what's wrong with Communism without having to bother our heads about its indigestible literature. We can tell an evil system when we see one. . . ." That sort of approach was President Reagan's great strength early in his Presidency, and it put the Kremlin on the defensive.

DJILAS: There is no case for that approach now. Are you suggesting that a judge who is sophisticated enough to study the jargon of the thieves who will come before him becomes their accomplice? Of course he doesn't. But he has to understand, when considering the case, what the defendants are talking about.

¹ Teresa Toranska, *Oni: Stalin's Polish Puppets* (tr. Agnieszka Kolakowska, Collins Harvill, 1987).

—*The moment we adopt words such as glasnost and perestroika into English, French, German or Italian, we bring a good deal of Mikhail Gorbachov's thinking with them. He is aware of this and is proud of it. Isn't that a warning that the "crude" American conservatives may have a better instinctive understanding of what the Communist system is about than trendy journalists and policy-pundits?*

DJILAS: No. The answer to a foggy understanding of the Soviet system is a clear understanding of the Soviet system. The answer to subliminal propaganda is reason and the knowledge of history. You can't cut corners in the study of human affairs.

—*I would have thought Gorbachov would do well to extract at least one practical lesson from recent developments in Yugoslavia—the rising vulnerability of the "dominant" nation in a multiracial state, once decentralisation has taken effect. I am thinking of a by now famous "unfinished memorandum" of the Serbian Academy of September 1986.*

DJILAS: Well, this remarkable document did indeed give an important warning. It claimed that the largest nation in Yugoslavia has been reduced to unequal status, not least because the Serbs (unlike their neighbours in Croatia and Slovenia) have not been allowed to create their own state, or to use their own language and alphabet. The academicians said that this inferiority of the Serbs *vis-à-vis* the other nations of Yugoslavia was due largely to the 1974 Constitution which had turned the country's Federal system into a loose Confederation. Individual republics had acquired the right to veto the will of the majority, and the Serbs came to be looked upon as "hegemonists", "centralisers" and "policemen".

WOULDn'T ALL THIS *have a familiar ring to people like Alexander Zinoviev, Vladimir Maximov and Alexander Solzhenitsyn? They would argue (as, in fact, they have done) that in the Soviet Union, too, it is the dominant nation that is now the underdog. It is the Russian heritage, they would claim, that has been distorted by an imported ideology. It is Russian living standards that are way below those of the Baltic republics, Armenia and Georgia. Disproportionate numbers of the most influential jobs are being held by non-Russians in the apparatus, in the armed forces and in culture. Russia is being de-Russified, they argue, and deprived of its character. These have become favourite Russian themes in the Soviet Union; and they have their followers within and outside the Party.*

I would have thought Gorbachov would be well advised not to follow the Yugoslav example if the status of the Russian nation within the Union is dear to him. The question is: Can he sustain democratisation and openness as his key policies without giving fresh relevance to the right of national self-determination as guaranteed in Article 70 of the current Soviet Constitution? What would there be to prevent Armenians,

Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Latvians and Ukrainians from saying: "Democracy must surely begin at home—we want our own form of government and our independence"?

In a remarkable appeal to the 19th All-Union Party Conference, the Plenum of the boards of the Estonian "Creative Unions" has already said so, and has had its message printed in the official press²:

"It is relations between the Republics and the Union bodies, joined voluntarily to form the Soviet Union, which are at issue here. It is the need to re-establish the Leninist principles of sovereignty and equal rights."

And if this were not explicit enough, Heinz Valk, a rank and file member, reminded the Plenum:

"Nigol Andresen [one of the first Estonian People's Commissars] said on 22 July 1940: 'The joining of the Socialist People's Union as a nation, as a formerly separate state, should not be understood by others, who are evil-minded thinkers, as the abolition of our independence. . . .' At the same time, however, a man who is well known to us was twirling his moustache in the Kremlin and thought of the matter quite differently . . . according to Article 60 of the Estonian SSR Constitution, Estonia is indeed a sovereign state. . . . Why is it that a sovereign state, which can decide its affairs independently, must ask Moscow even for permission to publish a newspaper?"

DJILAS: The analogy between Serbs and Russians is tempting but not quite right. The Serbs are not a hegemonistic nation in Yugoslavia; the Russians are *very* much a hegemonistic people in the Soviet Union (whatever Solzhenitsyn, Maximov, Zinoviev and their followers may be saying to the contrary). True, Great Russian nationalism is, officially at least, not much in evidence qua nationalism; but the elder-brother role of the Russian nation through the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the imperial bureaucracy is crystal clear and openly cultivated. For example, until not so many years ago, the national anthem of the Azerbaïdzhan Republic contained these words: "The mighty Russian brother is bringing to the land the triumph of freedom and with our blood we have strengthened our friendship and our kinship with him. . . ."

—*Even today, the Uzbeks start their anthem with the phrase: "Hail, Russian brother, great is your people!"*

DJILAS: In other words, the Czarist legacy is alive and well. Centralisation, linguistic imperialism, the denationalisation of ethnic cultures of large parts of the Soviet Union, notably of the Ukraine and Byelorussia, are long-standing features of Soviet life. They have grown out of Russian history which is a history of centralisation and of expansion.

Russia did not follow the European path from nationhood to statehood. Muscovy came first—the Russian sense of nationhood came later. Hence the Russian people's obsessive fear that the state may disintegrate; that if the state loses its grip, the Russian nation might fall or be gravely weakened. That the Communist system, too, promotes centralisa-

² Sirp ja Vasar, 15 April 1988.

tion for its own reasons is a bonus and a happy coincidence.

None of this is true for the Serbs. The erosion of Serb standing among the nations of Yugoslavia cannot, therefore, be quoted as a warning to Gorbachov without a great many qualifications.

But you are right in saying that "openness", "democratisation" and "restructuring" give hostages to fortune in their own right. One cannot, as Gorbachov and his friends do, preach the freedom of the spirit, democratic participation and individual initiative without encouraging the Ukrainian citizen to ask: "And why should I be taught in the Russian language when my language is Ukrainian?" Or Estonians to protest: "We don't want to be swamped by Russians in our cities—put a limit on Russian immigration." Or Armenians—including Armenian Communists—to demand the revision of their Republic's frontiers, as they have, in fact, done in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Gorbachov and his friends preach to the Soviet people every day of the week about the "truth" which, they say, can at long last be spoken openly in Soviet society. After 50 years of suppressing the truth, Viktor Yakovlev reported in Kaluga Oblast (14 July 1987) "our collective return to the truth". If this is so, I can hardly imagine how the truth of national self-determination or the "truth that socialism may not be everyone's choice of an ideal society" can be barred from open discussion, or divorced from the process of democratic "restructuring". For many people *glasnost* and *perestroika* may mean precisely non-socialism and independence.

—Such claims, still scored in the approved key, are already being widely heard; and Gorbachov does not like them. At his meeting with representatives of the Soviet media (in July 1987) the following exchange was recorded ("Pravda", 14 July 1987):

"A. A. Belyayev (Editor-in-Chief of "Sovietskaya Kultura"): 'The awareness of the international essence of Soviet socialist culture is disappearing from the speeches of certain personalities in the arts who advocate the originality and purity of national cultures.'

M. S. Gorbachov: 'Every people has its language, its history, it wants to understand its roots. Can that be contrary to socialism? Of course not. But on the other hand, if someone retires into himself, struts about and starts passing this off as an absolute value—that is unacceptable.'"

Echoing Gorbachov but speaking more openly in Hungary, Alexander Yakovlev put the Soviet fears bluntly (Hungarian TV, 30 July 1987).

"Nationality policy requires special tact and extreme sensitivity. When any kind of friction starts to develop regarding the nationalities, this can swell into an avalanche irrespective of the endeavours or wishes of this or that person."

³ Lenin wrote (on 31 December 1922): "... not only formal equality is needed ... it is necessary to compensate in one way or another ... the non-Russian for that mistrust, that suspicion and those insults which in the historical past the government of the 'great power' nation inflicted upon him."

DJILAS: The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict has proved Alexander Yakovlev only too right. On 9 July 1988, in Vilnius, a large gathering of more than 100,000 people, representing the three Baltic Republics and a pro-*perestroika* group from Byelorussia, heard calls supporting the Armenian plea for the self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh. The call of nationalism travels with great speed.

The Soviet leaders are worried, and with good reason. Shortly after Gorbachov's visit to Yugoslavia, Fyodor Burlatsky warned: "Yugoslavia shows us the limits of decentralisation. . . . We have to lessen central power, but not go as far as Yugoslavia. . . ."

But let me add, before we lose the point, that there is, of course, a small element of truth in the Solzhenitsyn-Zinoviev-Maximov type of argument about the "unequal" state of the Russian nation. It's true that the ordinary Russian bears the main burden of empire, without sharing its blessings. But the fact is: almost every Russian, lowly or elevated, embraces with enthusiasm the idea of Russian aggrandisement and takes for granted that he has to make sacrifices for it. He compensates for these sacrifices by the conscious enjoyment of Russian hegemony—a hegemony which is now donning the mantle of "socialism".

Lenin who was, by Russian standards, tolerant towards the non-Russian nations of the empire and was hard on "Great Russian chauvinism",³ nevertheless reconquered almost all those bits of the Czarist Empire that had taken pre-1917 Bolshevik propaganda seriously and seceded from the new Communist state. He quashed Ukrainian independence; retook Georgia after the Georgians had been solemnly assured (in the Treaty of 7 May 1920) that their independence would be respected; invaded Khiva and Bukhara; and so on. By the end of the Civil War all parts of the far-flung Czarist Empire were back under Bolshevik Russian rule, with the exception of Finland, Poland, and the Baltic states (which had become independent under international recognition) and Bessarabia (which had been annexed by Romania).

WHAT YOU ARE saying is that even a reforming and apparently tolerant Gorbachov, with *glasnost* and democratisation on his lips, would not permit his ideas to be translated into independent national, much less separatist policies, no matter what the Soviet Constitution may be saying about "self-determination" and, indeed (under Article 72), about the right of every Republic "freely to secede from the USSR"?

DJILAS: That is what I believe to be the case. In Communist theory "socialism" is a superior form of social organisation for nations which are supposed to be transitional ("consciousness lagging behind life"). This is, clearly, rubbish. But it has always given the Soviet leaders an excellent excuse for denying restive Uzbeks and Tatars self-determination and their right to independence.

Mind you, my impression is that Gorbachov will have to go a long way towards meeting national and ethnic demands, even if he does not underwrite the independence of his colo-

nial territories. The logic of his own propaganda will confront him, in Hegelian fashion, with some highly unexpected and unpleasant consequences. This may not be a bad time for the Baltic nations, the Ukrainians, the Uzbeks and others to come forward with their demands—as the Armenians have already done, and the Estonians and Latvians are in the process of doing. For a start, the Soviet leadership would have to agree to respect the Soviet Constitution and to live up to their commitments under principle VIII of the Helsinki Accords which spells out every nation's right to self-determination. The resolution of the All-Union 19th Party Conference on the "relations between nationalities" has fudged the issue.

—The problem (as Moscow would see it) with the Armenian demand for the re-incorporation of Nagorno-Karabakh in the Armenian Republic was that it had, originally, no anti-Russian or anti-"socialist" edge. It fed on the ancient Armenian conflict with Islam and the injustices of Stalin's nationality policy. It was, therefore, difficult—though not impossible—to brand it as "nationalism" and "extremism".

Doesn't the ethnic distribution of Armenian Christians inside Azerbaidzhan and of Muslim Azeris in Armenia—and the current tension between the two nations—remind you of the terrible things that happened to Serbs living in Croatia and Croats living in Serbia during World War II?

DJILAS: Yes, it does; but there is an important difference. In pre-Communist Yugoslavia, no one imagined that the state, or its governing philosophy, offered a magical cure for the elimination of national conflicts. Communism does make such a claim. Consequently, the Armenian upheavals strike at the very heart of the contention ("myth" would be a more appropriate word) that proletarian consciousness, Soviet rule and "internationalism" automatically heal the feuds and absorb the conflicts among nations. Of the many misconceptions underlying Communist rule, this may turn out to be the most lethal.

—Article 78 of the present Constitution says that the boundaries of the USSR's Republics may be changed only by the agreement of the Republics concerned and with Moscow's approval.

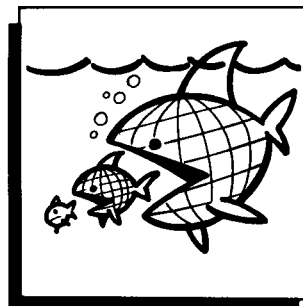
DJILAS: This will make Gorbachov's job even more difficult, for I cannot see the Azeris agreeing to surrender Nagorno-Karabakh, or how Moscow could overrule them—assuming that it wished to, which it does not. It has, in fact, decided to suppress the Armenian protest.

The 23 March 1988 resolution of the Praesidium of the USSR makes the point that giving way to the Armenian demand would spell the end of the "friendship of the peoples of the USSR as an integral, federal, multinational state". It would lead to "unpredictable consequences". And so it might! Yet, on 12 July 1988, the Governing Council (Soviet) of Nagorno-Karabakh announced its secession from Azerbaidzhan and declared itself an autonomous region of Armenia under the ancient Armenian name of Artsakh—which the Azerbaidzhani Supreme Council immediately rejected.

Remember Gorbachov's words in his 70th anniversary ora-

tion. In 1917, he said, "mankind crossed the threshold of real history . . . we departed from the old world and irreversibly rejected it". Well, Nagorno-Karabakh demonstrates that, stripped of the utopian rhetoric, Soviet reality bears an uncanny resemblance to the "old world" which has, after all, not been so "irreversibly" rejected.

2. "The New Class" as Early Warning



AS LONG AS the Russian element, both inside and outside the Communist establishment, persists in believing that it has a right to rule, one cannot see how regional bids for independence, or even "sovereignty, Soviet-style" can be successful. And there are no signs that the Russian nation would allow its estate to shrink.

In the matter of "Empire", the Party and the Russian nation seem to speak with one voice. The loss of a Union Republic would be a blow to Russian hegemony and it would probably spell the end of the Soviet Union as well as Gorbachov himself. Aren't we, therefore, unduly optimistic to expect that Gorbachov will live up to his words on the peripheries of the Empire—or else admit that the "truth" relevant to economic perestroika does not apply to "the colonies"?

DJILAS: The Soviet Communists have never shrunk from locking up loquacious mullahs and suppressing "bourgeois nationalism". Of course, Gorbachov and his men do not relish the prospect of Muslim fundamentalism reaching their own Muslim territories from Iran, for example. But they can deal with it so long as the disease stays outside the Party and the apparatus. They are experts at suppressing nationalism and organised religion. What they must be worried about is the penetration of the Party and the bureaucracy by nationalism and religion. When the local Party, too, wants to pull away from the Centre because it is closer to the nation it rules than to the power-holders in Moscow—that is when the alarm bells should start ringing in the Kremlin. And this is what appears to have happened in Alma Ata and is now happening, on a much larger scale, in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Baltic Republics. In Kazakhstan, Gorbachov used the whip hand because he would take no risks with the Empire. He then packed the Kazakh leadership with Russians and had the ringleaders punished. He behaved very much like a competent Czar.

—The "indigenisation" of Bolshevism has produced some unexpected consequences. It was Stalin's fervent ambition that "indigenisation" would deepen the roots of Soviet rule in the peripheral national communities. And so it did, under Stalin. Under Gorbachov, however, it seems to be promoting the "nationalisation" of the local Party and the apparatus, with the results we now witness with increasing frequency. In Armenia

and Nagorno-Karabakh, the Communist apparatus as well as the Armenian Church under Vazgen I, the Supreme Patriarch, came out openly (26 February 1988) in support of attaching Nagorno-Karabakh to Soviet Armenia. Some of the first calls for the rehabilitation of the victims of Stalin came from within the Latvian and Estonian Communist establishments.

But coming back to Yugoslavia: in the matter of regional independence the Yugoslav model must surely strike Gorbachov as, literally, counter-productive. Liberalisation of the Federal structure has turned Yugoslavia into so many mini-states: each with its opinionated and often recalcitrant local leadership, and each conceiving of itself as a self-contained oligarchy (tempered, though, by degrees of corruption commensurate with local tradition). Whatever Gorbachov may think of the successes (such as they are) of the self-management system, he cannot want to go down the road of Federal decentralisation.

DJILAS: No, he cannot. But I can quite see why those who want the Soviet Union to disintegrate encourage him to follow "the Yugoslav model". Bids for various forms of national separatism are now openly made in Yugoslavia. In Slovenia, where criticism of the central government is strongest, influential people argue for an "independent Slovenia" in the European community. In 1971, some Croats, too, wanted autonomy under the UN, a separate currency and the reform of certain institutions—because Croatia, in their view, had become the paymaster of the poorer Republics. Even in Serbia, a feeling of disaffection with the Federal state is now gaining ground, partly because Belgrade has been unable to defend the lives and property of Serbs in the Albanian province of Kosovo, and partly for the reasons we have quoted from the memorandum of the Serbian Academy.

—I suppose Gorbachov would be equally ill-advised to take his cue from the state of the Yugoslav League of Communists?

DJILAS: Yes, he would. The Yugoslav League of Communists is in deep crisis, not only because of its poor social and economic performance, but because it is split, in reality, into eight parties. Each represents the interests of a national Republican constituency. The bonds uniting them in Belgrade are weak; they all pull in separate directions. They are united, though, in their distrust of what they call the Federal Party. On the surface they are not anti-Yugoslav or anti-Serbian; but their suspicion of the central bureaucracy does make it seem to many Serbs that they are hostile to the most numerous nation in the Federation. In short: the story of "decentralisation of Communism" in Yugoslavia along national lines is bad news for Gorbachov.

HOW IS THE spirit of Gorbachov's reforms going to affect the future of Moscow's East and Central European dependencies? The Soviet-Yugoslav Declaration (of 19 March 1988) appears to have repudiated the Brezhnev Doctrine. It contains, in Section II devoted to inter-Party relations, these words:

"Proceeding from the conviction that no one has a monopoly of the truth, the sides declare their lack of any claim to impose their own ideas about social development upon anyone else whomsoever."

Even more important, in the inter-State section, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia

"... confirm their commitment to the policy of peace and the independence of the peoples and countries, their equality of rights, the equal security of all countries irrespective of their size and potential, socio-political system, the ideas by which they are guided and the forms and character of their associations with other states or their geographical position."

I would be surprised if some of the East and Central European nations didn't conclude that the time was ripe for fresh moves to be made to free them from the apron-strings of the Kremlin. And this feeling would, in some cases, be as strong within the Parties as with the public in general. In Hungary, for example, a bold but cautiously formulated "social contract" has been drafted by one influential group of dissidents. It foresees what one might call "Constitutional Communism" and some recovery of Hungarian independence within a more tolerant and economically weakened Soviet Empire. It would, above all, do away with the extra-legal status of the Communist Party and subject it to the control of a duly elected parliament. Another and more radical group ("Network of Free Initiatives") calls for a multi-party system and the removal of Soviet troops from Hungary.

The intriguing question is: have the Gorbachov reforms put the "national question" on the agenda? In a recent lecture (in London, on 28 January 1988), Zbigniew Brzezinski said that they have.

"The region as a whole [Brzezinski observed] is experiencing today both political liberalisation and economic retrogression—a classic formula . . . for revolution. . . . It is not inappropriate to pose the historically pregnant question of whether the year 1988 might not be initiating the new "Spring of Nations" in Europe, a parallel to 1848. It is no exaggeration to affirm that there are five countries now in Eastern Europe, each of which is potentially ripe for a revolutionary explosion. It is no exaggeration to say that this could happen in more than one at the same time."

DJILAS: First, I do not take the "repudiation" of the Brezhnev doctrine at face value. In 1955, Khrushchev and Bulganin "went to Canossa" in Belgrade. A Declaration was signed which was every bit as forceful in asserting each country's right to absolute sovereignty and to non-interference in each other's internal affairs "for whatever reason", as is the March 1988 joint Declaration. Yet, one year later, the Soviet Union was threatening Poland and crushing the Hungarian Uprising.

Second, the national question is not yet openly on the agenda in Eastern Europe, but I have no doubt that, if the pace in Moscow continues, it will be put there. I do not, however, believe that the developments of 1956 will be repeated. Khrushchev's revelations about Stalinism led to the rise of Gomulka in Poland, which in turn sparked off the

With Gorbachov in Belgrade

Belgrade



YUGOSLAVS are complaining that they are in an economic and political mess, but anybody arriving in Belgrade from Moscow is struck instantly by the comparative pleasantness of life in a vaguely communist country that sits neither side of the iron curtain but now feels much closer in spirit to the West.

For a Muscovite, Belgrade is a breath of fresh air. As for Slovenia, the north-western area of Yugoslavia, nestling against the Italian and Austrian border, it seems almost paradise.

Mr Gorbachov, who yesterday finished his five-day Yugoslav jaunt, must have noticed. But I doubt that he wants to imitate it.

THE TROUBLE WITH Yugoslavia, from the Kremlin viewpoint, is that the Yugoslav Communist Party—the “League of Communists”—barely exists: it has just enough authority to block effective change but not enough to rule and reform. And Slovenia, as the Slovenes say, hardly seems part of Yugoslavia at all: in attitude and prosperity, it has gone West.

THE FIRST REALISATION as you leave the plane is that people are materially better off. Many Yugoslavs are poor, especially further south, and with 160% inflation and \$23 billion in foreign debt, many are growing poorer.

Unlike Muscovites, however, they have a decent diet, and do not have to queue for meat and other basics. In winter they are not short of vegetables and fruit. They have cars—including a great many Mercedes.

LJUBLJANA, the Slovenian capital, spry and beautiful, makes Moscow look like a grubby Hicksville. Coming from Moscow, one is childishly delighted by the service with a smile, the bustling waiters with real menus, the doorman offering to carry your case.

Far more significant, though, is a feeling that Yugoslavs are not psychologically and physically fenced in. By entering a smart hotel one does not step through a loop into a world of abnormality from which most of the natives are excluded, where gruff doormen look you over, check people in and out, demand your reason to be there. It was ludicrously agreeable just to walk into a hotel alongside casual Yugoslavs.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to overstate the power, on the mind, of travel. Millions of Yugoslavs have visited the West. Very few Russians have. Slovenes watch Italian and Austrian television. Information flows uninhibited.

A Belgrader can buy a “Daily Telegraph” on the day of publication, while “Pravda” comes a week late and is little read. Yugoslavs make a point of not speaking Russian, even though many of the middle-aged learnt it and it is close to their own Slav tongues.

In Moscow, people are still remarkably insulated. I often suspect that even top Soviet Party-men, despite their special sources, see the West through the filter of the 70-year-old ideology and gobbledegook which still publicly prevail.

THE KEY DIFFERENCE between Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is that in most of the satellites, especially Poland and Hungary, few people believe in communism,

because they know the West. They are part of its culture and history.

In Russia, not everyone loves the Party but they accept it as the “guiding light”, while old-fashioned Russian nationalism helps the Party in times of stress. In Yugoslavia, not even members of the Communist Party give the impression of believing in communism.

THERE ARE 1,000-plus political prisoners in the country, mostly nationalists who feel more Albanian or Croat than Yugoslav. But the sense of social-cum-political control is absent, partly because of alternate centres of power and wealth.

The churches, unlike the Orthodox in Russia, are not craven. Peasants still own 83 per cent of agricultural land. Moonlighting and black-market activity are even more open and widespread than in the USSR. Money floods in from relatives in the West.

In a partly-successful attempt to cope with nationalism, each Republic has a high degree of autonomy. As ideology fades, national identity sharpens and the federal centre wobbles.

INSTINCTIVELY, MR GORBACHOV would have sniffed at what he learnt of Yugoslavia’s nationalities puzzle: not for him such a long leash for Armenians or Estonians or the many Soviet others.

But Yugoslavian ethnic diversity increases the mood of pluralism. All the same, Yugo-liberalism has limits. “We have glasnost but we don’t have political ‘perestroika’”, says a clever and affluent lawyer, who would have been hounded out of business in Russia. “We have freedom without democracy.”

THE CURIOUS ECONOMIC SYSTEM of “socialist self-management” is supposed to give workers control of enterprises. To a degree it does and they regularly go on strike to prove it (horrors for Mr Gorbachov).

It fails when local Party bureaucrats bred on Communist patronage oppose profit-seeking commonsense and people getting rich without permission. As Mr Gorbachov may discover when his similar stand-on-your-own-feet incentives start to rock his factories, a single Party and a real market invariably clash.

ON WEDNESDAY the cheekiest Slovene magazine, “Mladina”, tried to call for a market economy integrated with the West, for the abolition of the current “political monopoly” and a host of other radical reforms: this time, its nerve too raw, the Party banned it. But “Mladina” still exists.

THINKING YUGOSLAVS are sceptical about Mr Gorbachov’s reforms but wish him well. “Of course, he is 30 years behind us”, they say grandly. They think that if he gets as far as they have, he will run aground on the concepts of “socialist pluralism” and “market socialism”. They are contradictory.

Mr Gorbachov may have noticed that Yugoslav glasnost has led people to despise their Communist Party. Neither the weak Yugoslav party nor the strong Soviet one can contemplate allowing “pluralism” to reach its logical conclusion: allowing people to vote Communism out of office.

It is just conceivable that, one day, in Yugoslavia, it may happen.

Xan Smiley

in the DAILY TELEGRAPH (London)

Hungarian Uprising. Gorbachov appears to be a man of much greater intelligence, prudence and foresight than Khrushchev. He has, so far at least, not held up Stalin to national obloquy, although he and his supporters often speak meaningfully of the illegalities and the "tragedy" of 1937-38. His formula is that despite the injustices of the 1937-38 period the story of Soviet socialism is one of overall success. To give those injustices undue emphasis would damage the self-esteem of the Soviet people and create unnecessary divisions.

Although my own convictions run absolutely counter to this tactic—I believe the crimes of Stalin must be named and the Stalinists given no quarter—I recognise the prudence of Gorbachov's caution. This is one reason why I do not expect the Gorbachov reforms to be interpreted by the East-European satellites in a manner that would lead to a violent rejection of the system.

—At the 19th All-Union Party Conference, Gorbachov announced that a monument would be erected to the victims of Stalin. Will that not open up countless old wounds and raise the demand for figures to be given and the perpetrators to be punished?

DJILAS: It might, but I believe Gorbachov is strong enough to control any turbulence. This is a "revolution" from above. Although Gorbachov would like it to become a more spontaneous affair, because that is what his battle with the bureaucracy now requires, it is not in his or in the Party's interest that de-Stalinisation should lead to a genuine revolution from below, for that would mean the end of the system.

My second reason for believing that the Soviet reforms will not cause Eastern Europe to go up in flames is that the Soviet leaders—all of them, from Khrushchev to Gorbachov—have learnt certain lessons from the bloody events in Hungary in 1956. They learnt that national sentiment is not to be trifled with—and however savage the retribution after 1956 may have been, the Kremlin would never again deceive itself into thinking that it could deal with the East European countries as though they were satrapies. Ordering the satellite leaders about by telephone stopped after the Hungarian blood-letting. Even the vice-regal role of the Soviet ambassadors changed, though I must admit it did not change in every case. We remember well enough how, in 1968, the Soviet Ambassador in Prague acted with the arrogance of a representative of an occupying power, and in Bulgaria the role of the Soviet Ambassador is still that of a governor-general.

But my forecast for Eastern Europe would be an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary loosening of the links with Moscow. The Soviet leaders now realise, even if they cannot say so loud and clear, that the national factor is much more decisive within the socialist camp than the ideological "proletarian" factor, and will make concessions to it in order to keep the lid on the Empire. Indeed, they seem to be hoping that *glasnost* and *perestroika* will offer the satellites the kind of Europeanised up-to-date model of "socialism" that the Prague reformers had on offer in 1968—but in the wrong place and at the wrong time.

—If so, their hopes may well prove to be unfounded. Learning from the Soviet model—even a "liberalising" Soviet model—runs into deep cultural and historical resistance in most of East and Central Europe. It is, of course, quite possible that the spirit of "Gorbachovism" will be used as a handy stick to beat the East European governments with (it is already being so used by the Hungarian writers); but only as a means to an end, and that end is national independence or, shall we say, maximum national independence compatible with Eastern Europe's geopolitical position. The fact is that public sentiment rejects any variety of Communist rule. I remember how the brief flowering of "Eurocommunism" in the mid-1970s had virtually no national impact (although it boosted the morale of dissidents within the Party and of some ex-Party members).⁴

DJILAS: There are, nevertheless, straws in the wind—and they are no more than that—that betray movement in the Soviet Union on a broader front than perhaps any of us expected; and this will have its repercussions in Eastern Europe. For example, the Belgrade magazine *NIN* recently published an interview with a Soviet person who uttered so harsh a critique of the shortcomings of the system that no Western Sovietologist could have done better. One of the solutions he offered—and offered in a context that made it clear that the idea was being quietly discussed in Moscow—was the replacement of the Communist party by *two* communist (or, as he called them, "socialist") parties. The one-party system was a failure, he said; there was a need for some form of an opposition. A second "socialist" party would supply the feedback, or words to that effect.

I don't have to add that a two-party system would fly in the face of everything that goes by the name of "socialism" in the Soviet Union and would deal a body-blow to Leninism. Two-party socialism is probably no more than a thought floated, under the cover of "openness", by a few individuals. Nevertheless, it is a sign of the sort of forces Gorbachov is releasing within his own Party.

THAT THE QUESTION of softening, if not directly breaking, the monopoly of the Communist Party may now be on the agenda of Soviet thinking can be inferred from one of Gorbachov's own observations. Speaking to representatives of the media (on 14 July 1987), he felt it necessary to defend the leading role of the Party. Why defend it, if it is not under attack? No one, he said, should run away with the idea that

“. . . it is possible to get by without the Party. . . . If anyone thinks otherwise he is, at the least, mistaken. . . . Social demagogues have found their way into some editorial offices. . . . They are being particularly vicious in their attacks on cadres.”

Only a few weeks earlier (23 May 1987) Georgi Arbatov was asked, in the course of a Soviet-American telebridge programme, whether the system could be widened under Gorbachov into a multi-party system, and this is what he said:

“Our historical development has been such that we have one party. Actually, at the beginning of the Revolution

⁴ See G. R. Urban (ed.), *Eurocommunism* (London, 1978).

there was not one party but there were two, and even a faction of a third party, I think—the internationalist Mensheviks. Then they withdrew from the coalition of their own accord and a one-party system was formed. . . . One can imagine in principle a system with the same property base and the same social relations as ours with not one party, but two, three or four. That is possible in principle and in theory. We have had debates about this and, in effect, have come to the conclusion that there is nothing in it that would contradict the system itself. . . .”

An even more intriguing account of how the one-party system came into being in the USSR was given by the Novosti spokesman, Rozental, in response to a request by journalists to fill in the “blank spots of history”.

“The one-party system in the USSR is the result of the rejection by the leaders of the parties of Russian petty-bourgeois democracy, which formed part of the Petrograd Soviet of workers’ and soldiers’ deputies, of the proposal of the Bolsheviks that a multi-party Soviet government be formed. The Mensheviks, the Social Revolutionaries, the Popular Socialists and others came out openly against Soviet rule, unleashing a bloody civil war in conjunction with the bourgeoisie. . . . The West may, to a certain extent, regard itself as a co-author of our single party system.”⁵

DJILAS: Arbatov was, shall we say, economising with the truth and speaking to gullible Americans who don’t know their Soviet history. But it is certainly of some significance that he should have defended, at least in principle, the anti-Leninist idea of a multi-party system. The influential L. I. Abalkin raised it as well at the 19th Party Congress:

“Are we capable of ensuring the democratic organisation of public life, while preserving the Soviet organisation of society and the one-party system? Yes or no?”

—If the question of what precisely the Party is for and how it should fit into “democratisation” is now beginning to surface, Gorbachov himself is responsible for planting it. It was he who said in 1986 that, since under Soviet socialism “feedback” could not reach the decision-makers through an Opposition, the Party itself would have to generate the criticisms and supply the feedback. This may well have been the idea that encouraged more sanguine spirits to talk about a two-party “socialism”. But, in his formal pronouncements, Gorbachov has certainly given no encouragement to the multi-party reformers. At the 19th Party Conference he observed:

“Recently, we have seen attempts to use democratic rights in the pursuit of anti-democratic aims. Some people seem to think that in this manner we can solve all our problems, from opening up our borders to the creation of opposition parties. The Central Committee of the CPSU believes that such abuses of democratisation are in total contradiction to the aims of *perestroika* and go against the interests of the people.”

⁵ Moscow briefing of the Novosti press agency (25 February 1988).

DJILAS: The fact that a discussion of this formerly forbidden topic is taking place in the Soviet Union at all is an indication of the way the wind is blowing—and that wind is being carefully monitored by those sensitive minds in Budapest, Warsaw and Prague who seem to miss nothing.

So they must also have monitored the disappearance of “*partinost*” from Yugoslav culture. One of the most encouraging things about the Yugoslav model of “socialism” is the return of culture to some semblance of normality. It is there that the satellite parties and the Gorbachov reformers could learn a thing or two to the benefit of Russian and East European cultures—and, come to think of it, to the benefit of the Communist movement itself.

Yugoslav culture is now as good as conducted *outside* the framework of the official ideology. Even in Croatia, where the Party is more orthodox than in most of the other Republics, literary culture is divorced from the Party. In Belgrade, no self-respecting author would toe the Party line. Writers who joined the Party out of a sense of careerism write *away* from the tenets of official thinking and would be deeply offended if anyone suggested that they were “constructing socialism”. Even in Bosnia, where the authorities carry in their baggage a heavy ballast of Stalinism, and punishment is still meted out for “thought-crime” (political gossip and the like), culture has become a strictly non-Party affair.

The most important aspect of this relative cultural freedom is the liberty of our historians to write more or less objective history. There remain subjects that are delicately avoided—one does not attack Tito or the Communist Revolution in general terms—but the rest of history, including Party history, has now become the sort of craft any respectable historian in the West would recognise as normal. Of course, Yugoslav historians offer wildly different and conflicting interpretations and are frequently at each other’s throats. Surely, however, that is quite normal among historians and indeed a sign of the vitality of historiography.

WE MENTIONED that some of the more sanguine spirits in Moscow may have taken Gorbachov’s 1986 call for a better feedback within the Party to be a call for the dilution of the authority of the Party or even a call for an “opposition”.

DJILAS: They didn’t have to be all that sanguine, though, since Gorbachov has given hostages to fortune. Note the sort of words he avoids using. There is nothing in his speeches about a classless society—about the advent of Communism, or even “advanced socialism” (which was dogma under Brezhnev)—about the Soviet Union overtaking the US in per-capita production—or any of the other promises that were made in Khrushchev’s programme in 1961.

—There is a certain lack of passion in his speeches when he touches on the leading role of the Party; a difference of key from the one used by Ligachev, for example. In his talk to media-men (in July 1987), he used the curious phrase “the Party must not lag behind the processes going on in society”.

DJILAS: Precisely. At the January 1987 plenum, Gorbachov made a remarkable observation: "The life of the working collectives is unimaginable without the Party, the trade unions, the Komsomol, and other social organisations. . . ." This puts the Party on a par with the Komsomols and trade unions. In most cases he does insist on the leading role of the Party, though he tends to drop his predecessors' claim that Soviet society is homogeneous. At both the January and June 1987 plenums he argued: It is true that antagonistic contradictions have ceased to exist in Soviet society, but eliminating them does not mean "levelling them out".

For me, this is an important admission. For it expresses the recognition that conflicts stemming from group interests, collective interests, departmental interests and Party interests exist—and that they have *stratified* society. It follows that these interests must be given expression, and that implies the quiet entry of pluralism.

In almost all of Gorbachov's articulations there are hints or statements that "parasitic" groups within the *nomenklatura* are responsible for the present state of the Soviet economy. . . .

—a certain Milovan Djilas wrote a book along those lines thirty-odd years ago. . . .

DJILAS: Yes, in *The New Class* I anticipated most of Gorbachov's current findings. But even before that, in 1953, I wrote an article in *Borba* in which I argued: Of course, a single party cannot secure socialism and democracy, but even a homogeneous, single-class society couldn't do it. Conflicting interests would remain. Freedom and democracy would *not* be safe under the rule of the working class. That ended my political career; in January 1954 I was expelled from the Central Committee.

I find it, also, intriguing that Gorbachov should now want to vest power in *non-Party* cadres. Here again, we anticipated Gorbachov by well over 30 years. In 1952-53 some of us—for a time, Tito himself—felt that the leading role of the Party should be cut back and non-Party people given more influence. I personally urged that the power of the Party should be reduced—so did Kardelj and Bakaric. Tito, however, having looked at the idea, could sense the approaching dangers of a post-Stalin thaw and finally disagreed.

—What was his argument?

DJILAS: He was jealous of his personal power which he had wielded without opposition during and since the War. He told us that the long-term success of the Revolution required a strong man, that in the Soviet system the leading role of the Party was absolute and that without it Communism would disintegrate.

—In Hungary Kádár did give a more emphatic role to non-party people some years ago, yet the system has not disintegrated nor did his personal power suffer. His "retirement" in March 1988 can certainly not be ascribed to the influence of the non-Party elements. Do you think these things are yet to come in Hungary and, perhaps, eventually in the Soviet Union too?

DJILAS: I would hesitate to predict. Certainly, Gorbachov's new deal represents the terminal phase of the Stalinist model of Communism—and, we may safely say, of the *Soviet* model of Communism—for, apart from a few years in the 1920s, there has been no other. That doesn't automatically mean the end of dogmatism and Leninism. In Yugoslavia and Hungary the Stalinist model has been dead for some time, yet the remnants of the past are alive. One-party rule and police control are, alas, in rude health.

—Your reading of the Communist system has certainly come in from the cold since those dramatic days when "*The New Class*" was written behind bars. . . .

DJILAS: I finished writing *The New Class* on the eve of my imprisonment for what I had said about the 1956 Hungarian Uprising. I was myself responsible for sending the first part of the book abroad, courtesy of a foreign journalist. The second part was first hidden by my wife Stephanie, and then smuggled out through the same channel some days after I had started my term in prison. It is poignant to remember those conditions, sitting as we are in your study in Brighton 30 years on.

THE MAIN DIFFERENCE between Milovan Djilas and Mikhail Gorbachov is that Djilas followed his analysis of the Communist system to its logical conclusion and says "No socialism"—whereas Gorbachov's slogan is "More socialism". It will be interesting to see whether Gorbachov will still say "More socialism" five years from now and what he will mean by "More socialism"—if he hasn't "restructured" himself out of the leadership in the meantime.

"The anti-Party group led by M. S. Gorbachov. . . ." Can you see those words appearing in some future statement of the Central Committee?

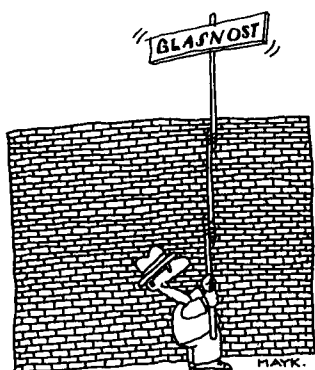
DJILAS: Nothing is impossible under Soviet rule; but so radical a "restoration" is, in my opinion, not on the cards. Political systems are not in the habit of committing suicide. In any case, Gorbachov, unlike Brezhnev, strikes me as a true believer. . . .

—so was Milovan Djilas. . . .

DJILAS: . . . and I cannot see Gorbachov presiding over the liquidation of Communism. He is a man who has begun to recognise what ails the system and is trying to change an Absolute Monarchy into a Constitutional Monarchy. In that he may succeed, and gain a good deal of credit for it. Since the 19th Party Conference, it is clear that *he* wants to be the Constitutional Monarch.

His plans for the rejuvenation of the local Soviets and for a powerful executive Presidency, with himself, undoubtedly, as President, point to a new political arrangement whereby a much reinforced State apparatus would act as a countervailing force to the Party.

3. "Inform the People . . . Blow by Blow, Crime by Crime"



veiling everything there is to unveil about the Soviet past? Can a new future be planned without the lessons of Soviet history being first publicly assimilated?

DJILAS: In the long run, retrieval of the Soviet past is the essential prerequisite of Gorbachov's programme of reconstruction. Soviet historians have frequently falsified Soviet history. They excelled, as we know, especially in representing the 1917 *putsch* against the Provisional Government and the forcible dissolution of the Constituent Assembly as "a Revolution". The full truth about the 1931-33 Collectivisation campaign, and the man-made famine resulting from it, remains to be told. So does the story of the Show Trials, the Great Terror and the rest of Stalin's despotism. The Soviet people cannot hope to understand the reality surrounding them without being told the truth about the roots of that reality. In our age of television and shortwave broadcasting, the true history of the Soviet system can no longer be hidden from the people. The question is only whether they get it in dribs and drabs, with a periodic shock accompanying each revelation, or whether they are given the full story and let the blame fall where it will. Soviet history must be rewritten from Day One—rewritten, that is, with complete intellectual integrity.

Calls for the reassessment of the Stalinist record are now made openly by Soviet historians such as Alexander Samsonov—and opposed by others, Isaak Mints, for example. Yury Afanasiev, writing in *Sovietskaya Kultura*, urges the authorities to permit "a full reassessment of Stalin's repressive rule", pleading that the suppression of historical facts deprives people of self-respect and spiritual strength. He argues that it is not enough to brush aside Stalin's terror as a "mistake" or a "personal shortcoming" as Soviet historians are inclined to.

These are significant developments, especially as they are accompanied by calls for the reassessment of the Khrushchev era too, which will have a direct bearing on Gorbachov's own. Fyodor Burlatsky's formidable essay on Khrushchev

⁶ Published in English as "Why Khrushchev Failed" in *ENCOUNTER* (May 1988).

⁷ *Sovietskaya Rossiya* (13 March 1988).

(*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 24 February 1988⁶) and Arkadiy Vaksberg's merciless critique of Andrei Vishinsky (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 27 January 1988) are pointers of great importance.

—There are a great many skeletons in the Soviet cupboard. Gorbachov is aware of this. I don't think he is against letting those skeletons haunt some of the living, but he seems to be anxious not to allow the soul-searching to turn into a night of long knives. His dilemma is neatly encapsulated in two antithetical articles which appeared, ironically, on the same day last summer (23 July 1987) in the Soviet press.

The one in "Izvestia" criticised the "distortions of historical facts in Soviet history textbooks", and called for the compilation of "an objective history book because reforms launched in the country can be made irreversible only by people who are not afraid of telling the truth, who have their own views and are capable of upholding them. . . ." "Izvestia" then inveighed against some—not all—of the same misrepresentations of Soviet history you have just criticised:

"In the period following World War II, a trend towards embellishing the country's history emerged. Deleted were certain undesirable names and even many events, such as authorised abuse during the Collectivisation when peasants were forced to join farm cooperatives; famine in the 1930s; the negation of genetics and cybernetics which were proclaimed pseudo-sciences. History textbooks failed to assess Joseph Stalin objectively. . . ."

A very different opinion was articulated in "Pravda" in the shape of a reader's letter from one Georgiy Vasilyevich Matveyets:

"We schoolchildren took part in subbotniks at construction sites and enterprises. We witnessed the building of socialism in our country. Our hearts and minds were moulded in this atmosphere of satisfaction with our ordinary working lives. . . . All that—the Five-year Plans, Stakhanov, the success of the Collective farm peasantry, the flights of Gromov and Chkalov, the Chelyushkin epic, the drift expedition by Papanin and his comrades, and many others—really happened, and Soviet people did it not out of fear but in conscience. People were inspired by the great idea. It mobilised them. They raced ahead. . . . It was a time when fairy-tales actually became reality. . . . That was the actual and heroic reality of Soviet people and it cannot be erased by any miscalculations, errors and even crimes on the part of one man, even though he may have worn the uniform of Generalissimo. . . . It seems to me that those who are denigrating our history in such a fashion have no sense of respect or love of their country and their people. . . ."

Gorbachov is clearly in an unenviable position. He would, as he has often indicated, be happiest if he could harness a truthfully-told past to perestroika; but the "social base" for that truthfully-told past doesn't exist—at least not yet. There are many people in the USSR who vested their work and honour in the Stalinist period and do not want to see that period disowned and disparaged. Ligachev is one of their spokesmen, and Nina Andreyeva's conservative manifesto,⁷ "I cannot waive princi-

ples", is as representative of their thinking as any we are likely to get.

DJILAS: It is a dilemma; but it is one Gorbachov will have to tackle even if he can do so only by stages. Suppose we shifted the scene of discussion to Hitler's Germany. Couldn't millions of Germans argue, in good faith, that in the 1930s they put their work and enthusiasm into changing unemployment-plagued and inflation-ridden Germany into a welfare state and a great power—and that their achievements shouldn't be denigrated because mistakes and crimes were committed by one man, Adolf Hitler?

No one in a position of responsibility would accept that sort of an argument in Germany, much less anywhere outside Germany.

I don't want to stretch my analogy too far because the two systems are not comparable. I would, nevertheless, insist that leadership and statesmanship put very special responsibilities on a reforming leader of the cut of Gorbachov. If he thinks, as he clearly does, that the Stalinist past landed the Soviet Union with burdens it can no longer support either at home or in its foreign policy, then he must pick up the threads of de-Stalinisation where Khrushchev left off, undeterred by the sort of sentiment (which I grant you may be quite widespread but no longer decisive) you have quoted from the pages of *Pravda*.

—Even General Jaruzelski has urged him in that direction, in the pages of *"Kommunist"*, to boot. He wants the truth to be told about the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939, and the question of who was responsible for Katyn is now all but openly discussed.

DJILAS: Gorbachov is a populist radical and a very un-Russian one at that. He doesn't believe in the control of the people by Authority. He thinks the population ought to and can control itself once it has been given the facts. Speaking to the workers of Zelenograd recently (29 July 1987), he said:

"People say: control is necessary. . . . But who should do this? If we are to count on controllers, then we will have to increase that apparatus still further. We have to do it through democracy, through the people participating in everything. This is the main guarantee of control and against all outrages, for the people see everything and against all outrages, for the people see everything and know everything, and won't allow them. . . ."

These are unexceptionable sentiments, even though they show a trust in popular wisdom that is not clearly warranted by history, least of all Russian history. But if wisdom resides in a free and fully-informed people, how can Gorbachov forego informing the people—blow by blow, crime by crime, lie by lie—about the long Stalinist past of which all of the Union's present troubles are the natural and inevitable consequences? It isn't enough to boast, as he did, that the Party was strong, that "we criticise ourselves as no one before has criticised us in the West or in the East. . . ." If the Party is that strong—give out the truth and nothing but the truth. We

must press for this because, when the chips are down, the liberalisation of the Soviet system is more important for the world than arms control agreements with the Soviet state.

DON'T YOU THINK Gorbachov is checking his impatience and proceeding by stages? He seems to have decided to deprive, first, the Stalinist era of its aura of heroism; and, having created a psychologically neutral land around Stalin, eventually, when he feels the time is right, to out-Khrushchev Nikita Sergeyevich by telling all. He would, then, perhaps launch a frontal attack on Stalin and link it to some move in his struggle for an uninhibited mandate.

In so doing, he would certainly not be short of support. "In order to compensate, at least morally, for past guilt and to avoid a repetition of lawlessness in the future", the Estonian Creative Unions say in their petition,

"... we consider it necessary for the Party Conference to make an assessment of Stalinist repressions as crimes directed against the Party, Soviet power and humanity. . . . Along with this it is necessary to complete and make public the rehabilitation of all the innocent victims of that period and to immortalise their memory."⁸

DJILAS: Cautious de-Stalinisation appears to be Gorbachov's tactic. Almost every day he, and the press that represents him, keep inching forward to a full reckoning with Stalinism. His position may be summed up in these words: We never can or should forgive or justify what happened in 1937 and 1938. Those who were in power are responsible; but that does not detract from all we have today, what the Party and the people accomplished while undergoing those trials.

I can accept this as a formula of transition; and that, I believe, is what it is meant to be, but no more than a formula of transition.

—Will the apparat stand for the final push, if indeed it comes to one? I have my doubts. V. M. Chebrikov's laudation (10 September 1987) of Felix Dzerzhinskiy to mark the 110th anniversary of Dzerzhinskiy's birth—he was celebrated as a great, humane leader—must have made Gorbachov wonder whether he and his KGB chief were marching to the same tune.

"Imperialism's special services [Chebrikov said] are trying to find new loopholes through which to penetrate our society . . . with the aim of instilling in Soviet people a bourgeois understanding of democracy . . . splitting the monolithic unity of Party and people, and installing political and ideological pluralism. . . . We have people who hold ideas and views which are alien and even frankly hostile to socialism. Some of them embark on the path of committing anti-state and anti-social actions. . . . There are also those who are prepared to enter into direct cooperation with the imperialist states' special services and betray the homeland. . . ."

Then came Chebrikov's warning:

"Clear awareness is needed that restructuring is taking

⁸ *Sirp ja Vasar* (8 April 1988).

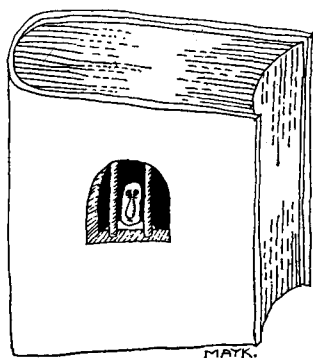
place under the leadership of the Communist Party, within the framework of socialism and in the interests of socialism. And this revolutionary process will be reliably protected against any subversive intrigues!”

DJILAS: Well, this is a tough warning, especially as the speech appeared in *Pravda* under the ominous headline “ASPECTS THAT MAKE HIM [Dzerzhinskiy] OUR CONTEMPORARY”. Chebrikov might as well have said “Aspects That Make Stalin our Contemporary”.

The strange thing is that Chebrikov, as we heard from Ligachev at the 19th Party Conference, was (together with Gromyko and Solomentsev) one of that small group of Politburo members who helped Gorbachov into the saddle at the the March 1985 Plenum of the Central Committee. Has Chebrikov changed? Has Gorbachov? Or is there some compact between reformers and conservatives that we cannot yet fathom?

Whether the *apparatus* would stand for the final push, if indeed it came to one, remains to be seen. If Gorbachov’s power base elsewhere in the state is strong enough, if he can provide more food and consumer goods, and if the *apparatus*’s personal interests are not dramatically affected, it might . . . but then it might not. The counter-attack encapsulated in Nina Andreyeva’s manifesto is a signal he dare not ignore.

4. Gorbachov, a Djilas Disciple?



YOU HAVE SAID that Yugoslav historiography has become fairly independent and reliable. Does that reliability extend to its treatment of yourself?

DJILAS: Yes, it’s beginning to. When they write about me in various papers and magazines, they quote from my speeches in 1949 or 1951

and publish the photographs that go with them. The quotations are correct and the comments neutral.

—For example?

DJILAS: Well, they might say that on such-and-such a day the Central Committee discussed higher education and Milovan Djilas said this or that. They neither embellish the official record nor distort what I said.

—But you are far from being “rehabilitated”?

DJILAS: Under the present régime, I’ll never be rehabilitated on the political level. You saw the Yugoslav Prime Minister’s attack on me in *Spiegel* (23 March 1987). He called me “a traitor *par excellence*”. That does not quite herald rehabilita-

tion. In the press, however, I have been to some extent *morally* rehabilitated—as a former leading Communist who had a certain part to play and was, shall we say, no worse than the others. That’s the line they take on me.

—It is not quite clear to me why, given the Gorbachov factor in the Communist world, you should not be rehabilitated on the political level as well.

DJILAS: Well, I am negotiating with certain Yugoslav publishing houses, and there is a vague possibility that my memoirs, entitled *Wartime* (which appeared in the USA and elsewhere some years ago and attracted much comment) will eventually be published in Yugoslavia. One historian who enjoys the confidence of the present leadership ventured the opinion, after some hesitation, that the book is not hostile to the Revolution, is rather well written, and offers an important testimony. If the book is published, I will feel that my “moral rehabilitation” as an author, not as a politician, will have been accomplished.

I do not, as I say, expect political rehabilitation because that would imply an admission on the part of the authorities that I had been right all along, and that might, in their view, reopen the road to my ideas.

—But the plain fact is that you were substantially right in almost everything you wrote. You were the first to expose the “New Class”, the corrupting influence of privilege, the gap between words and deeds in Communist practice, the lack of democracy in socialist society, the falsification of history, and so on. Perhaps you had the misfortune of being right before your time, but that should not be counted against you after three decades.

DJILAS: I’d be the last to disagree. It would be false modesty on my part to deny that the present “Thaw” in the Soviet Union does give me some satisfaction. But, in the political world, being right is a long way from meaning that you will receive justice.

—Let me be quite open about this. Does the régime fear that you might, if you were fully rehabilitated, make a bid for power?

DJILAS: No, the régime is not afraid of that. It is just worried that my rehabilitation would cause turbulence in the Party. I have never been a threat to the political power of the Party—but I have been a force of opposition in ideology and could perhaps become one again. And as ideology is what justifies the existence of the Party and supplies its vocabulary, this danger is something the leadership dare not discount.

—Would you like to be in power again?

DJILAS: Every man of ideas would like to see his own put into practice. I have, from time to time, been led by a similar desire. I would have liked my ideas to have some influence because I believed they were right. But I was never *hungry* for power, and I am certainly not anxious to have any power now.

—Certainly your portrayal of Tito in your biography⁹ cannot be prejudicial to your political rehabilitation—since you paint a picture of him that is surprisingly favourable and even reverential. You depict him as a Communist of absolute dedication and a man of vision and integrity. No one can accuse you, after Tito's death and thus without danger to yourself, of taking your revenge on him by remembering him unkindly.

DJILAS: Well, you will probably be surprised to hear that some of the Belgrade opposition thought my book was far too friendly to Tito. "You were unduly fair to him", they told me. "He was a lot worse than you have shown him to be." I do not accept that view. I described Tito as correctly as it was in my power to do so. I tried to dispel delusions but I also recognised the great qualities of the man.

—It crossed my mind as I was reading that book that you were, perhaps, lifting Tito on to a higher plane of history than he deserves to be on in the eyes of disinterested historians—because by lifting him you were also upgrading your own stature. This may sound unkind, but isn't it an inclination we all have? If you show a fellow writer or politician, with whom you had good or even bad relations, to have been a significant man, you are automatically showing yourself to be of his order of importance. You and Tito may have had your differences but—so the reader is given to understand—those differences were the differences of great men and of historical importance. Did this kind of consideration play a part?

DJILAS: It was certainly not a conscious consideration. Perhaps subconsciously it may have coloured some of my writings. But I flatter myself that my place as an intellectual is separate and independent from Tito. Not that I was politically as important as some Western commentators have tried to make out. I was not groomed to be Tito's successor. In the hierarchy of the Yugoslav leadership I was probably in fourth place—after Kardelj and Rankovic, although I am vain enough to believe that I was a better writer than Kardelj, and more original as an ideological thinker. But in terms of power politics I was merely number four, and I never thought of myself as the pretender. At the same time, to the end of Tito's days, I sustained certain basic sympathies for him as a Yugoslav revolutionary-leader and human being. This is probably the source of your impression that Tito comes out better in my book than his critics—and some of my friends—would have liked and expected.

BUT YOU WERE, to my mind at least, the keeper of the purity (if that is the right word) of the Revolution. You were a fanatical Communist when you felt the old Order and the new Invader had to be fought. You were suspicious of Stalin when he began to encroach upon Yugoslav independence. You became increasingly critical of your fellow Communists in power when you discovered that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" corrupts just as any other dic-

tatorship. And when the cup was full, you declared that the Revolution had become a fraud, and that Communism could answer none of the world's really pressing problems.

So, whatever your official or unofficial place may have been in the Yugoslav leadership's pecking order, you do, in history, stand next to Tito as a kind of counter-Tito-of-the-Yugoslav-Communist-conscience—a heretic who may have saved the faith (at least to his own satisfaction) while consigning a corrupt church to the flames. That is, perhaps, too metaphorical a way of putting it. But it leads me to ask you whether you do, nowadays, look upon yourself as a heretic of the Revolution?

DJILAS: A revolution is always a tragedy in human affairs. I don't like to romanticise it, and dislike intensely people who do. The Yugoslav Revolution, too, was a great evil—although it would be erroneous to say that it could have been avoided. Our Revolution did resolve certain problems we inherited from Royal Yugoslavia, but it didn't satisfy the aspirations of the revolutionaries. Revolutions never do. There can be no greater insult to my conscience and intelligence than to be told that the "socialist" revolution was a "humanitarian" event that "changed the course of history". There are no such sudden watersheds in history; and I cannot quite see how enormous blood-lettings and sufferings can be termed humanitarian even in the embellishing light of retrospect. Yet, from time to time, revolutions are inevitable because the guilt and corruption of certain ruling classes seem to be an ineradicable feature of human history.

I was, as you rightly say, a fully believing Communist. Communism for me was not just a social policy, not a means for manipulating people, not a stepping stone to advancement, not a way of acquiring and exercising power, but a deep, personal, moral commitment as strong as religion.

Only a true believer has the right to rise up against his own convictions and reject them at the risk of being damned as a renegade or a heretic. When I reject revolution and the dictatorship that follows it as great misfortunes, I speak as a man who believed in revolution fervently, but has learned from bitter experience and long reflection that while revolutions may be pleasing to the temper of revolutionaries, they



⁹ Tito: *The Story from the Inside* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981).

achieve virtually nothing. That does not mean to say that revolution is not justified when enormous injustices pervade the lives of men and every peaceful means of putting them right has been exhausted. They must, however, be the last resort.

If you now describe me as the keeper of the conscience of the Yugoslav Revolution, a through-and-through heretic who rejects Revolution—that's an identification I accept without demur.

—Looking back on your life at the age of 76, do you feel that you lost something vital when you lost power in 1953? Or did your writings compensate for that loss?

DJILAS: They did, and they did more than compensate because they were, and are, much closer to my real self than the exercise of power. If you said to me: "Choose between being the leader of Yugoslavia and writing books", my answer would be: "If I knew that I could do something essential for the freedom and prosperity of the people of Yugoslavia, I would choose to be the leader." But if you asked me: "Choose between being a leader *under Tito* and pursuing your vocation as a writer", I would choose writing without hesitation.

—Would it be because writing itself is a form of power, or because writing gives you so much satisfaction?

DJILAS: It is more the latter. I am, as you know, not only a political writer. I am a belletrist as well. Circumstances pushed me into politics; but power has no attractions for me, least of all the day-to-day exercise of power. The repercussions of whatever power and influence I had were severe when my spell in power ended. But the lion's share of the suffering was borne not by myself, even though I was twice sent to prison, but by my family and relatives. I had, after all, freely chosen to do what I did, but my dependents had not. My wife Stephanie and my son Aleksa were the real victims. My wife was a young and strong woman, and she could cope. But my son Aleksa was only about four when I was first sent to prison, and about nine when my second term came. For a small boy it is an immense shock to have a father in prison. Boys heroise their fathers. To see a father behind bars and humiliated is, I feel, the worse thing that can happen to a child.

—An inscription you were kind enough to write for me in a copy of your book, "Rise and Fall",¹⁰ says: "... as further evidence that my 'fall' was more 'glorious' than my 'rise'..." Should I read this as a summing up of your career?

DJILAS: Those who are seen by the world and the church to which they once belonged as heretics, usually get better billing in history than those who are not. In that sense my "fall" was more "glorious" than my "rise". But I also meant that dedication to be read by you as a bit of a personal message

because you have, in the course of our many conversations over the years, witnessed my "fall" and given it a dimension I have found new and challenging.¹¹

—I said earlier that you were a keeper of the purity of the Revolution. Can I change my metaphor and say that you were in many ways a Philosopher who became King (even though you were only a Viceroy to Tito)? You found yourself in a position where you could, as a Communist intellectual, put many of your ideas into action because you had a good deal of power.

DJILAS: No, Tito alone was King; but he was King with a vengeance.

—Weren't you in reality Tito's mentor? When your teaching was abused, the philosopher's "love of wisdom" induced you to part company with your charge. You discovered that your monarch wasn't true to his Kingdom. . . .

DJILAS: No, I was not a philosopher even in the weakest sense of the word; but I did see the emperor without his uniform, without his crown, and without his decorations; and that was sobering.

The most I would say is that I was a thinker in Tito's court, yet one without pretensions. My ambition was, and still is, to put pen to paper and have some impact through the written page on my nation's destiny. There isn't a single Serb writer who has not sought to involve himself in shaping the future of his people; I am no exception. To be so involved is probably characteristic of the intelligentsia of all small nations. But it is especially true of those nations that arrived late on the stage of history or are in danger of extinction. You could observe the same trend in Poland and Hungary both in the 19th century and nowadays. The realisation that your nation may be on the brink of disaster focuses the minds of its intellectuals wonderfully on the one thing that really matters—survival.

YOU NOW CLEARLY POINT TO "the Nation" as the focus of your loyalties. Isn't this slightly at odds with the support you gave "Eurocommunism" in the 1970s, and with your tacit approval of the Gorbachov round of reforms?

DJILAS: Not at all. Anything that dilutes a generically bad political system must be welcome. Anything that lessens the impact of a disease is still a great step forward for those suffering from it.

—But aren't "Eurocommunism" and "Gorbachovism" likely to help those on the European and American Left who have always argued that there is nothing basically wrong with the Soviet system? Take away the accretions and distortions, they claim, and "socialism" will stand out once again as the way forward.

DJILAS: There are precious few left who would subscribe to that misguided idealism. The Soviet system has become an

¹⁰ Milovan Djilas, *Rise and Fall* (Macmillan, 1985).

¹¹ See George Urban, "A Conversation with Milovan Djilas", *ENCOUNTER* (December 1979) and in *Stalinism* (London, 1982).

anti-model. Even 70 years of ceaseless Gorbachovism would not improve it to a point where it could *begin* to compare with the life-chances and freedoms offered by the liberal democracies. Only fools and scoundrels could be tempted.

So let me say it again without rehearsing my arguments: Communism as culled from Marx and abused by Lenin is totally unsound. It is ill-conceived in principle and does not work. You can alleviate some of its wrongs and patch up some of its defects, but you cannot turn it into an acceptable system. We can say all this without denying that Marx was a great historical figure and an original thinker in some areas. I reread his *Kapital* for the last time towards the end of my spell in office in the spring of 1950. Our problem then was to find a way out of Stalinism. I found *Kapital* a most relevant piece of writing. In Volume II, I hit upon the idea of self-management and informed my comrades and Tito. Tito would, however, not immediately accept it, despite the respectability of the source.

—Why wouldn't he?

DJILAS: Initially, he just didn't understand what I had in mind. Self-management was outside the standard Communist experience and there was no sanction or model for it. However, being a practical and intelligent man he eventually understood that this might turn out to be a good idea. It didn't. But the two points I am making are: first, that Marx equipped us in our search for unorthodox economic solutions with a practical idea that the Soviets are only now beginning to embrace (having rejected it as "treason" when it was first launched in Belgrade); and, second, that Tito was good at using other people's ideas but poor in generating original ones of his own. In this he was like Stalin. Even the concept of building "socialism in one country" was Bukharin's not Stalin's (which may, incidentally, complicate or—who knows?—ease his full *political* rehabilitation).

—The need to refer to the sacred books was a real one even within the small circle of the top leadership?

DJILAS: It was. The question of presentation was crucial. In offering self-management to the public and the world, it was important that we should have canonical sanction for striking out in this new direction. Of course, you and I realise that every heresy has to stick to the revealed texts while actually giving them unorthodox meaning. With Marx we didn't even have to do that, because Marx contains so much that is ambiguous or genuinely "anti-Communist" (in the Stalinist interpretation of Communism) that we could conveniently help ourselves to whatever served our purpose.

—A device Gorbachov has not, as yet, made use of but one he is surely familiar with. At the moment his reforms are all wrapped in Leninism, in which he steers a similarly selective course; but who knows what the future may hold. If he wants to dilute the primacy of the Party, for example, he may very well go back to Marx and argue that the idea of a Communist party is rejected in the "Communist Manifesto", and he may exploit many other loopholes and ambiguities in Marx to

liberalise the system without erring from the original revelation.

DJILAS: Eventually, he might. Whether he could get away with it is another matter.

—What exactly did Tito say when you first put the idea of self-management to him?

DJILAS: Tito's first reaction was, as I said, negative. He felt the workers in Yugoslavia were too uneducated to run a self-managing economy. But when Kardelj, Kidric and I explained that self-management might solve some of our worst problems and offer a model to others, he quickly understood and said "Well, let's do it: we can advance it under the slogan 'All factories to the Workers!'. . ."

Initially, self-management did show certain successes. It opened our economy to the market, and gave us a weapon against Stalinism and the abuses of the bureaucracy. After a short time, however, it came unstuck for the reasons we have already discussed and is now the source of my country's present round of misfortunes. In short: self-management without a free-market economy, and that without political pluralism cannot be made to work. It is one auxiliary utopia among many that Communists resort to when practical life repudiates the principal utopia of Communism itself.

WOULDNT YOU SAY that after his (March 1988) visit to Yugoslavia, Gorbachov might, nevertheless, go down that utopian road? He admired Yugoslavia's relative plenty, the well-stocked shops, and the absence of queues.

DJILAS: Compared to the economic situation in the Soviet Union, especially as far as consumer durables and food are concerned, Yugoslavia is, of course, a veritable paradise. But Gorbachov would be gravely mistaken if he mistook our auxiliary utopia for a solution. We have what we have because we are parasites, in one way or another, on the really free-market economies and parliamentary democracies of the West. Such political and economic "successes" as we have had cannot be measured in terms of developing the unused resources of "socialism" (as Gorbachov is in the habit of saying), but only in terms of repudiating socialism in fact, if not in language.

—The dominant Western conception of socialism appears to concern itself no longer with "property relations" and the "ownership of the means of production" but, rather, with equity and political decision-making. Would you agree with that change of emphasis?

DJILAS: I would indeed; it is not merely a change of emphasis but a reconceptualisation of socialism. The need for that reconceptualisation within the Soviet system is what Gorbachov's visit to Yugoslavia should have brought home to him.

The Jump

A FAMILIAR NAME appeared on the screen, above a little American flag. The figure in goggles and ski hat, crouching at the top of the jump slope, could of course be anybody. Nevertheless, Victoria peered forward, wondering whether she might glimpse some recognisable feature among the phosphorescent colours framed in her old television.

The figure launched himself onto the steep slope, driving his poles into the snow with big, gleeful, muscular stabs. His name still hung above him as he plunged towards the lip of the jump, and Victoria had a distinct memory of seeing it in a similar square-angled computer print at the top of a series of papers on Greek literature. Was this the same Carl Pepperall? His face was too masked, his body too crouched, for her to tell. She turned the volume knob, but the commentator must have fallen silent for the build-up to the jump. The figure gathered speed through the rush of static. A different camera showed him in profile slicing across the screen, and for the first time Victoria felt less than amused by the blotting paper definition of her set. Could it be him? He hurtled down towards the lip, and with a final convulsion of his doubled-up body, took off into the lurid blue sky. But instead of turning into a sleek missile of compacted limbs and skis, he seemed to trip over some invisible rift in the air, and open out into an ungainly assemblage of flailing, wheeling spindles that tumbled through the sky like an enormous daddy-long-legs.

Victoria watched askance as the man crashed to the ground and lay there in a heap, abruptly motionless, the unnatural colours of his ski clothes bleeding into the snow around him.

The commentator started to speak again, but Victoria lunged forward and turned off the television, wishing she had done so before the sports coverage had begun, though glad at least to have been quick enough to protect herself from a knowledge she did not wish to possess.

She took up her work again, and edged herself back into the mood of delicate scorn with which she had been reviewing her old professor's latest offering on Epicharmus (how invigoratingly difficult it was to have a reputation for an unflinching critical eye!). The words flowed easily until, like a sudden *whump!* of oxygen into a smouldering fire, a glimpse of something vast, shadowy, and unnameable opened up in her.

The year before, Victoria had taken a teaching job at the small college of Branderhaven, in eastern Connecticut. From her classroom she could see across the campus to a buttressed gothic fantasy that had been built to house what the prospectus described as a gym of unrivalled sophistication. It would already be full of students when she arrived to teach her morning class, and however late she left at night, there would still be dozens of young men and women exercising on the mysterious contraptions gleaming in the golden interior light.

Occasionally they make a sortie, she had written to her colleagues back in London, *for a lecture or seminar, but reluctantly, and you feel a little cruel dragging them away, even though it looks like a Bosch hell in there. Mens Sana indeed. The faculty are the same. Not for them the salt of bracing interdisciplinary debate as seasoning to their (epicurean!) lunches; no, any remarks that don't bear directly on the subject of fishing are considered practically scandalous. My contributions are lavish, as you can imagine. Do you remember Chester Platkin, the "corn-fed Oklahoman"? The men are all like him, though the head of Humanities—a Hadley or Bradley—does show minute signs of life. He has offered to escort me around New York. No flowers please.*

A HARD BLUE LIGHT was at work on the city; chiselling and bevelling angles, glazing planes. The cold sky looked packed with cut crystal. The place produced its customary effect on this latest initiate:

"It's like being inside a diamond", Victoria announced. They passed a luminous violet tanning parlour, a shop selling the flowering parts of tropical plants. "No, I'll tell you exactly what it's like, it's like a mixture of London, Rome, Madrid and Venus."

The brilliance of the morning and the affability of her companion had released a surge of effusive spirits in her, and she talked as she had not done since leaving London. Her phrases grew steadily pithier and more daring.

"There's a saurian strain to everything, even the people", she informed Brad, "they seem alert to different disturbances, do you know what I mean? As if they get